OUT OF THE SILENCES

MARY E. WALLER

130

Gladys McConnell.

Cedar City, Utah

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OUT OF THE SILENCES

BOOKS BY

MARY E. WALLER

THE WOOD-CARVER OF 'LYMPUS
A DAUGHTER OF THE RICH
THE LITTLE CITIZEN
SANNA OF THE ISLAND TOWN
A YEAR OUT OF LIFE
FLAMSTED QUARRIES
A CRY IN THE WILDERNESS
OUT OF THE SILENCES
FROM AN ISLAND OUTPOST
MY RAGPICKER
THROUGH THE GATES OF THE NETHERLANDS
OUR BENNY

OUT OF THE SILENCES

BY

MARY E. WALLER

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"Go through, go through the gates;
prepare ye the way of the people;
cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones;
lift up a standard for the people."

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OUT OF THE SILENCES

PART ONE

I

THE LAND

I

THE LAND

1

WINTER silence is on plain and plateau, on mountain slope, pass and summit, on every butte, in every gulch and gully, on all the river benches below the bluffs.

This all-pervading silence is hushed into deeper stillness by thickly falling snow; and even the deeper stillness, which makes the eardrums of those who hear it ache, is intensified when at intervals it is broken by the howl of the gray wolf, hunger haunted.

There is audible no cry of the human; nevertheless the cry is here, only lost in the vast of a cold-benumbed and snow-smothered land.

2

The course of a Canadian river, the Souris, is laid from its source in Saskatchewan southeast with ample curve far into the Dakota country; thence, doubling on itself in an immense loop, it flows northwest into Manitoba.

Northeast of the huge, longitudinal pocket of land thus formed, and contiguous to it, are the fastnesses of the Turtle Mountains. The Souris is a frozen moat at the western base of this natural fortress of the prairies and the plains.

Southwest from the bottom of this pocket, a hundred miles away across its great wind-swept plateau, the Missouri duplicates, but on a smaller scale, the Canadian river's curve and half cinctures a lone Indian reservation.

East from this reservation a hundred miles, west a hundred, northeast a hundred and fifty to Turtle Mountain, this land of the Dakotas lies buried under an accumulation of snows: an area of wintry desolation, approximately thirty thousand square miles, with a population of whites, half-breeds, Indians, a few thousand souls all told — almost the God-forgotten.

II

THE BOY

II

THE BOY

In the Dugout

I

It lies under the snows on an upper bench of the river; and within it are two men and a boy. One, the uncle of the child, while crossing the plains lost his sheep in the opening blizzard of the season. The other, a saddle-maker from the Turtle Mountain region just north of the Canadian border, having sold his wares among the widely scattered settlers, was on his return trip to the mountains when the same blizzard compelled him to seek shelter in a second-hand dugout. He was the means of saving the boy and the man. Since that day, early in December, the three had bunked in together.

The early setting-in of the winter and its continued severity were phenomenal. The plainsmen, the men and soldiers at the fort, the Indians on the reservation, the hillmen, the few white settlers on their farms, all shared in the suffering consequent on the rigors of this never to be forgotten winter in the eighties when the cattle on the plains, the sheep in the mountains, the horses on the range perished by the hundreds.

The two men and the boy have been already seven

weeks in the dugout. Once at the risk of life the saddle-maker took his pony and attempted to make his way to the reservation thirty miles distant. The attempt proved abortive and he returned exhausted to his companions.

The prospect of captivity seemed indefinite. There was no more fodder; their provisions were exhausted; the fuel for the open fire reduced to a pile the size of a bushel basket.

The men, lying flat on their blankets but supporting themselves on their elbows, are playing cards. The boy in like position, but close to the small fire, is reading in an undertone from a soiled coverless book open on his blanket. Now and then he spells a word as if feeling his way.

The men play in silence with a mechanical monotony that lacks both interest and energy. Their handling of the cards is expressive of mere grim listless doggedness a trifle short of desperation. It might have easily been that they were playing for time as against eternity. The saddle-maker is forty-five, his companion not more than twenty-eight, but both faces look prematurely aged, winter-worn, gaunt from insufficient food, strangely pinched about the nostrils.

Suddenly the younger threw down the cards and spoke in a low tone:

"It's no go, Bunkie. Let's throw for luck tomorrow and — we'll settle which of us goes to the fort."

The saddle-maker nodded. He felt in his pocket for the dice. "Three runnin' throws o' the deuce."

"Done," said the younger man grimly.

They shook the dice in their hands: the saddle-maker with slow deliberate motion, his junior with

short quick jerks of his fist. Before they threw, the boy began suddenly to spell in a loud monotone:

"A-s-s, ass; w-a-g, wag; e-d, ed. What's that, Bunkie-nunc?"

The rattling of the dice ceased. His uncle looked puzzled.

"Try it again, Bob."

"A-s, as; s-w-a-g, swag; e-d, ed. What's it mean?"

"Well, I'll be blistered," the saddle-maker broke in, amazement audible in his exclamation; "wot ye givin' us, Son?"

"The big flood."

"Flood, eh? Ye're gettin' forrard o' yer time; the Missouri can't get out o' this straight-jacket 'fore May. Wot flood?"

"Noah's Ark's flood."

"I heard tell o' that." The saddle-maker looked for a moment as if the dark walls of the dugout had opened suddenly and shown him a vision.

"Read what comes before it, Bob." His uncle slipped the dice into his pocket.

"'And God remembered Noah and every living thing, and the cattle that was with him in the ark —'"

The saddle-maker interrupted him; the tone was bitter: "He'd sure be doin' us some favor if He'd remember us-all — an' the little beast."

The boy, unheeding, read on: "'And God made a wind to pass over the earth and the waters a-s-s, ass; w-a-g, wag; e-d, ed —?'" He looked inquiringly at his uncle who answered the question in the boy's voice and eyes.

"It means the waters stopped rising any higher — asswaged." He repeated it for the child's benefit.

"They used to spell it with a *u* when I was a kid."

A pleased smile furrowed still deeper the saddle-maker's cheeks. "Blame me, if I don't begin to remember somp'in' 'bout the animiles in that ark o' yourn, Son. Give me some more." He dropped the dice into the pocket of his shirt.

"No; I'll sing 'em to you," said the boy, slapping to the book and springing to his feet. "I make believe this is our ark, an' you an' me, an' the pony,— Spud is an elephant, — an' Bunkie-nunc are the animals. My mother used to sing it to me," he said proudly. "Now, listen."

He sang in a clear child's falsetto, at first with much gusto, miming from time to time the various animals, and imitating their calls and cries to his own joy and the delight of his audience.

"The animals entered two by two
The elephant and the kangaroo.

"Weasels and badgers and blacktail deer
And mountain sheep with horns so queer.

"Too-whit, too-whoo! And a terrible growl —
The cinnamon bear and the big brown owl.

"Coyotes and wolves and prairie dogs,
And coons and loons and great fat hogs —"

His efforts to grunt and snort at the same time were so ludicrous that the two men actually laughed aloud. The boy broke into a gleeful cackle that was quickly checked. A strangely tired look came into his face. He swallowed hard once or twice; then, as if ashamed to make such confession of weakness, he

said in a low voice: "I guess I won't sing the rest of it — not to-night. It's too long — an' — an' I'm so awful hungry I feel queer — here." He laid his hands over his stomach.

The men's faces went gray white.

"Come here, Bob," said his uncle.

The boy staggered slightly. His uncle took him in the hollow of his arm and drew an end of the blanket closely about him. The man cleared his throat before he spoke again: "This'll warm you up, Bob. We'll have supper now." He looked significantly at the saddle-maker who rose painfully, as if cramped, and opening the rude plank door went out.

The man, still holding the slight form of the child closely against him, took two sticks of Missouri drift and laid them on the dying fire. The wood caught. The boy watched it listlessly. In a few minutes the saddle-maker came in. He handed two small and narrow strips of hung meat to the younger man who, drawing a knife from his pocket, began to cut them into small pieces.

The saddle-maker took up a frying-pan from the corner. Carefully putting the two sticks on one side of the fire he raked together the embers, and dropping a handful of brown rice into the pan began to parch it.

"Is that all?" Bob spoke dolefully.

"All, Son?" The saddle-maker forced a laugh. "Why, ain't this 'nough for *you?* I'll bet ye the animiles in that ark o' yourn would say this 'ere was a mighty good feed — barrin' a hog."

The boy smiled faintly. "But it's for us-all," he said — "animiles." He smiled again as he spoke the last word.

"My eye! Ye thought that, did ye? That only goes to show how a little cuss like you can make a big mistake." He shook the pan back and forth with an easy, loose-handling of it that betokened practice. The kernels rattled.

Bob sniffed. "That smells bully."

"Ye bet it does, an' it's goin' to taste better'n it smells. Ye see yer uncle an' me don't want no supper — not *now*. We'll have it later. Leastwise I'll speak for myself: I couldn't eat a ripe cherry if 'n accommodatin' wind just flung one right off the tree into my mouth; no sir-ee. Speakin' o' winds, we're goin' to set up to-night to watch out for one ourselves, ain't we, pard?"

His companion nodded.

"What kind of a wind, Bunkie-nunc?" Bob roused up for he scented a mystery.

"We want the kind of a wind you was readin' 'bout in the Good Book, I reckon."

The saddle-maker put a stop to further questioning.

"There now, Son, eat away, but slow an' sure does it. Count 'em all, every grain, an' only ten to once."

The child needed no urging. Little by little he was fed, the men seeing to it that he chewed both rice and meat thoroughly. When he had finished he heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

"I can sing you the rest 'bout the animals now."

"No, Bob, you keep that for another night. We want you to bunk in early for Bill and me must set up for that wind. Guess we'll be lookin' to see if it's comin' now, Bunkie." His uncle spoke to the saddle-maker; then, to the boy: "You set right

here 'longside of the fire while we go on a still hunt for that wind —" The boy interrupted him.

"No, no, take me too; let me see the wind comin.' I'm warm," his voice grew shrill in his eagerness to gain permission to be one of the exploring party, "an' I've never hunted a wind before, never in all my life. Oh, please, please, Bunkie-nunc, let me go."

The two men looked at each other. The saddle-maker nodded. The younger man answered the boy:

"You can go this once," — Bob gave vent to a prolonged joyous squeal and squirmed out of the arm that still held him so closely, — "but you'll have to whistle for the wind that's goin' to bring us luck."

The boy was already wrapping himself in his hooded blanket. The men said nothing, but put on theirs. The saddle-maker raked together some ashes over the embers and the two charred sticks. The three went out into the night, or rather the dawn of night. The full moon was just rising. They could not see it for the bluff behind the dugout was too high; but they were at once aware of its presence.

The blue black of the winter sky, closing above them like a vast lid, was flooded gradually with a crystalline light. The heavens seemed to expand and dome the white world about them. An upper stratum of air was charged with the finest dust of wind-whirled snow, too fine, too light, too dry, like high-blown volcanic dust, to settle readily.

Of a sudden some powerful suction of the wind, which they could hear *grumming* on over the vast plateau, caught up a mass of uncrusted snow from under and along the edge of the bluff some hundred yards from where they were standing, and whirled it

aloft in a magnificent spiral all sparkle and glitter. Higher and higher it rose till the level rays of the moon transfixed it, suffusing the mass with faint rose, violet, and purple. Slowly a pulsating arc of delicate color outlined itself distinctly far, far above their heads, but only for a moment; it vanished with the dispersion of the snow-spout.

The saddle-maker broke the silence.

"Wasn't there somp'in' 'bout a bow in that ark story o' yourn, Son? I heard a circuit rider preach 'bout it good many years ago."

"Yep." The boy seemed lost in wonderment. He roused himself. "But that was a rainbow, and this was a snowbow, wasn't it, Bunkie-nunc?"

"Right you are, Bob, an' you won't be likely to see another soon."

"What lifted the snow up so high and so quick, all curly like?"

"The wind; and you won't have to whistle for it either; it's sure up there to-night. We'll go up an' see how it's blowin'."

By daily work the men had trodden down the snow on the ledge about the dugout, and against the bluff where the snow had drifted deep, forming a sloping talus as it were, they had stamped, and dug out, and shaped a stairway. At the top of it, on the level of the plateau just above the dugout, was a pole. It was so placed to emphasize the position of this refuge to some plainsman threatened with disaster. The men climbed to the top with the boy between them.

Around the pole, also, the snow was trodden firm, kept so by the two men. Day after day, week in, week out, the saddle-maker and his companion took turns on watch at this spot, looking, waiting for

some sign of life. Round and round the pole each man paced on his shift, or leaped or ran according to the cold and the power of the wind, so widening the circle of trodden snow from time to time. But not once had the uniform whiteness shown any object on it. Not once had the awful silence been broken by howl of wolf or cry of any living thing. Everywhere silence, muted snow-silence: soft, fine, dry snow filling the air, falling day after day, silently, relentlessly, smothering at times in its density; at times scudding before a biting wind that attained a velocity of seventy miles an hour.

In all these weeks there had been no melting of these snows, consequently no possible chance for the formation of a crust, the road of safety for the northern plainsman.

The younger man knew that there was but one chance for their lives; the atmospheric conditions must be just right. On this day these conditions had been in part fulfilled: the sun had shone with real warmth; a thin surface snow responded, and melted little by little. It remained for the night to create conditions that should enable the three to live a little longer a life that, despite all hardship, was dear to them.

On reaching the plateau the younger man drew a deep breath. "We're in luck," he said.

"You bet," was the saddle-maker's reply.

The child was wild with joy. The crust was already firm enough to bear his slight weight. He slid, shrieking in his delight, back and forth, round and round, first on one foot then on both. Finally he lay down flat on his stomach and propelled himself belly bump rapidly over the shining surface.

"Come on, Bunkie-nunc! Come on and slide! I say it's rippin' — bully!"

"Not strong enough for me, Bob, not yet — Hi, there!" he exclaimed as the boy in his exuberant fun sat down suddenly, the impact breaking the crust. He floundered helpless, half smothered in the soft snow till his uncle's rescuing hand pulled him forth and set him on his feet.

"That'll learn you caution, numskull," he said gently; "and you sure need it."

Bob began his antics again, but this time with an eye open for untoward events. The two men spoke together in low tones.

"By three it will be hard enough; it's dropping steady now. It will go below twenty, an' no chance of thawin' till sun-up."

"And the wind just right for the fort. It's a piece of damned good luck for us-all." The saddle-maker was emphatic.

"What was it Bob read? — 'And God made a wind to pass over the earth'?"

The saddle-maker answered solemnly: "He done just that; but," he added with stern emphasis, "*I* go; ye mind that."

The younger man smiled. "We'll toss for it —"

"No, ye don't! I know ye: loaded dice ain't in it when ye get yer mind set on stakin' yer life for us-all."

"I've got to go, Bunkie; I want to go. You ain't fit. You 'bout laid yourself out stiff tryin' to make the reservation more'n a month ago. You've got to stay — d'you hear? — an' look out for the boy; for I'm goin' sure as there's a God above. No — don't you say one word. It'll make me mad

clear through, an' when I'm mad like that I ain't responsible for what I do, an' you know it."

"That's so." The saddle-maker assented without any apparent irritation. "Ye mean ye'd rather I'd stay on an' look out for the boy — rather?"

"I mean just that." The words rang out sharply. They were heard by Bob careering over the snow crust some twenty feet from the pole.

"Did you call me, Nunkie?" he cried in a voice shrill with excitement.

"Nope; but come on — time to bunk in."

"Look, look, I'm flying!" he shrieked, fearing the men might not notice him. He had opened a flap of his blanket and found that the strong wind catching and filling it was carrying him on without any effort of his own. He sailed straight into his uncle's legs.

"He's caught on mighty quick, the little cuss; ye can't get ahead o' him. He'll know a thing or two, an' learn you an' me, 'fore he's ten."

2

The three made their way down to the dugout, Bob plying his uncle with questions at the rate of forty a minute as to the how, whence, wherefore of his newly acquired power of flying with a blanket.

His uncle made only a feeble attempt to satisfy his insatiate curiosity; he knew it would be an all-night job. The boy hied him to his bunk in the corner and wrapping himself closely in the blankets drew a corner over his head. But for a time his unwonted excitement prevented him from sleeping. After he had turned restlessly a few times, his uncle spoke:

"What's the matter, Bob?"

"I don't know; I'm seeing things —"

"What things?"

"Oh, just things — sparkles an' the snow whirlin' an' the moon big — big —" He turned again, a little sleepy at last. "Sing me something, Bunkie-nunc, please." This was always his request when he was overtired.

"What do you want, Bob?"

"You know, —" the voice dragged a little, — "the Texan Rang-er —" The voice dropped away into half-sleep.

"He's most gone," said the saddle-maker. "Sing, Bunkie."

And the man sang one of the dozen verses of an old improvised song that he and others far, far in the south under desert skies had made to while away time.

"I have saw the fruits 'er gamblin', its hardships I know well.
I have rode the Rocky Mountains wild, I've rode the streets of Hell.
I have been down in the Great Staked Plains where the wild Apache roams."

His voice, a full fine baritone, filled the dugout with its resonance, but as he went on it sank to a gentle minor, almost an undertone, soothing although tinged with melancholy:

"Perhaps you have a sister, boy, likewise a sweetheart true;
Maybe you have a mother who at home would grieve o'er you."

The four lines that followed were almost a whispered recitative:

"So if you have any in-*cli*-nation to rove or roam from home —
Take this advice from a Texan Ranger, Son: You'd better stay at home."

Bob was asleep, and soundly. The men proceeded with their preparations which they had been unwilling for him to see. They spoke but little. Once the younger man left the dugout and climbed to the level of the plateau to feel the wind and test the crust. When he came in he reported all going well. At twelve the saddle-maker insisted that he lie down and sleep.

"Ye can't set round till three or thereabouts an' make them thirty miles to the fort in good time — it's beyond bein' human. Turn in, an' I'll wake ye in time."

The man, wrapping himself in his blanket, turned in and slept as soundly as the boy.

3

The saddle-maker waited a while, then, taking his hunting knife from his outfit bag, he went out closing the door softly behind him. There were certain things that just for to-night he wished to do in silence and alone.

He entered a small dugout beside theirs and felt in the dark for the pony. There had been two of them when the men first sought refuge in this hole in the earth — the boy's and his own; the third had been lost with the sheep. Like the Indians on the reservation they had been obliged that winter to kill one for their sustenance. It was Spud's turn now. The saddle-maker made short work. He determined the boy should never know. There

would be no getting a morsel into his mouth if he realized his pony had been sacrificed.

Before he reëntered the dugout he, also, climbed to the top of the bank to look about, ascertain the time of night by the moon, test the crust, and feel the wind. He was satisfied with conditions when he returned to the dugout. Later on he opened the door and looked out: the moon, full and clear, was riding high overhead. He calculated it must be about half-past two.

He roused the sleeping man who took off his shirt and wrapped a long piece of flannel about twenty inches wide round and round his body, swathing it against the piercing cold and wind. Then he dressed himself for his trip of thirty miles to the fort where rations and help must be obtained. As a last preparation he slit two arm holes in his blanket.

The saddle-maker took a pair of skis he had manufactured out of what the dugout and the pony yielded, two snowshoes, which he had with him when he was overtaken by the storm, also a small hatchet, and went out.

The other, left alone, bent over the child, then straightened himself suddenly, turned away and taking from under his empty outfit bag a contrivance of canvas followed the saddle-maker.

4

Above, the men found that the wind was increasing in strength but still blowing steadily in the right direction. The crust was firm. The cold intense.

The younger adjusted his skis and slung the snowshoes on his back. The saddle-maker hacked off a

portion, some two feet, from the pole; he tied it on the snowshoes. Then he thrust a small package wrapped in canvas into the other's hand.

The young man spoke sharply: "No! You don't come anything like that over me. You'd starve yourself."

"Take it," said the saddle-maker sternly; "we've got the other meat —"

"You've killed Spud?"

"Yep; an' don't ye fret yerself 'bout us-all. We can hang on a good many days —"

"For God's sake don't tell Bob 'bout the pony," said the other in a low voice.

"Ye can bet yer life I ain't takin' no chances thataway."

"I'll be back inside two days — if this weather holds."

"Sure thing," said the saddle-maker with fine assurance. Each knew, however, that neither could deceive the other.

The man rose to his feet. The saddle-maker handed him the rag of canvas; he slipped his arm through the arm-piece of wood.

"So long, Bill," he said lightly.

"So long, Bunkie."

That was all.

The younger man turned at an angle to the wind. The triangle of canvas on the piece of wood suddenly flapped with a report that sounded flat in the frost-filled air; the small three-cornered sail bellied; the man was off, skimming the crust at the rate of a mile in three minutes.

5

The saddle-maker stood on the same spot watching the dark object and its foreshortened shadow speeding over the silvered crust. He knew that once the first swell should be passed he could no longer see it. He knew that for those thirty miles that lay between the man and the fort there would be one swell after the other, billowing white with the regularity of ocean waves over the great plateau of the Missouri.

He watched the diminishing blot on the white. Once some quick half turn, or tack, and the canvas caught the moonlight much as the breast of a gull, turning at an angle, catches the sunlight, so sending a signal-gleam to the watcher.

He strained his eyes to see the almost indistinguishable speck; another gleam, a mere point of accentuated light. When he looked again he could see nothing.

6

Owing to the depth of snow continually augmented by almost daily blizzards, high winds, and the intensity of cold, no mail had gone out from the fort or come into it for two weeks.

One morning four Indians from the reservation made their way to the post. They were nearly exhausted. They said that most of their dogs and ponies were being killed for food, and begged that rations be sent to relieve the distress of their people. They likewise reported that not far outside the confines of the post they had found the body of a man which they managed between them to bring in; they had left it in one of the empty scout-huts. . . .

The quartermaster identified the body; a foreman

on a sheep ranch some seventy miles to the west. A slip of paper inside his shirt gave briefly the location of the dugout and the desperate condition facing the boy and man. It was an appeal, solemn in its urgency, to rescue them.

The Colonel called for volunteers. The mail sergeant and six men at once responded. Forty-eight hours after the departure of the rescue squad in the mail sledge they returned bringing both man and boy with them. The frost was already in the saddle-maker's brain. The child was in delirium.

Weeks afterward, when the surgeon pronounced the boy's recovery permanent, the nine-year-old Bob Collamore had made, but all unconsciously, the first turn along that strangely deviating earthly pathway we name "life": he had both experienced and endured.

On the Road to Paradise

I

The saddle-maker was a much married man. His first venture was made in his extreme youth. He had little comfort from it, and with mutual relief the two agreed to the annulment of their youthful vows. All this happened far away in the lake and forest region of northern Minnesota where among the scattered whites and the many Chippewa he learned his trade.

After ten years' enjoyment of his freedom, he took unto himself a widow of a half-breed, Scotch on the paternal side, Cree on the maternal, who had peddled his wares along the border. She was a sturdy woman who proved for the next eight years to be his helpmate in the full sense of that word. She had one small son, Colin McGillie, whom the saddle-maker in the kindness of his heart looked upon as his own.

Mrs. McGillie herself, duly wedded as Mrs. William Plunket, immediately began to mother the man as she mothered her boy; this she did on the strength of being her husband's senior by ten years.

A year after her death, now four years gone, he comforted himself with a fine young squaw who possessed a lively disposition and an exceedingly uncertain temper. She was a Minnesota Chippewa who with her father, Long John, had come for a summer's visit with her relatives among the Crees across the border. She had borne him two children.

To this squaw he had left in trust the children, his stepson, the roomy hut, his roomier shed, his horse, one mule, and varied collection of livestock, until he should have returned from his annual trading trip. Generally he was absent three months. But this time he left the Turtle Mountain region early in September, and it was now the first of June. He had been repairing saddles at the fort for the last two months in return for the care given to him and the boy during their long sickness. He was given a broken cavalry mount to carry them home across the plains.

He was pondering seriously, and in considerable confusion of mind, this matter of his long absence when, having left the Souris on its northward course, he entered the country of the Turtle Mountains.

He knew Jane — so he called her — was a good squaw to him; no doubt about that. He had a degree of affection for her and was proud of her as the mother of his children. She pulled hard on the bits at times, but he had never let her feel them — not he. It was so much easier, so much more conducive to his comfort and peace of mind just to take

the outside of the hut for a while — for an hour, a day, a week, or month; to sleep in the shed on the sweet-smelling hay with his horse for companion; to go fishing up north on the lakes with Colin McGillie, or amble off alone on his one mule to a distant trading post, and return laden with some durable saddle leather and gifts acceptable to Jane: a woolen petticoat of flaming scarlet, a necklace of cairngorm beads, a feather, to match the petticoat, on a straw hat of the latest fashion — so easy all this, and so comfortable.

But nine months of absence? He was approaching his home with some doubts as to his reception.

2

It was an abrupt entrance into Paradise that the small boy, Bob Collamore, made when the tired horse that bore him began to climb the foothills of the Turtle Mountain country. He never forgot it.

All his life long with the coming of the days of a new June, he returned in memory to that wonder-journey through this stretch of green rolling slopes, clear lakes, little streams, meadows, and broad-leaved forests — a charmed country that beginning in North Dakota extends across the border into Canada. Its width from the Souris, or Mouse, is about eighty miles. The whole region rises from out the Dakota plains like a natural citadel.

He never forgot that June sky or its deep intense blue which domed his Paradise and was reflected in the crystal clear lake waters. After twenty years he could recount accurately the specimens of shy wild life in the forest he had encountered on that journey in June which brought him, at last, into his heritage.

The saddle-maker was a good guide and the boy's enthusiasm pleased him. His many questions di-

verted him from too prolonged and anxious thought of the morrow — and his squaw. It was the last day of their long trip northward over the Dakota plains and through this high region. It was their last night in the open. Sitting before their small campfire the boy began to chatter. The saddle-maker encouraged him, for he had proved himself good company during the last two weeks they had passed together on the one horse's back.

"An' you promised, honest Injun, you'd let me earn a pony too, didn't you —?" He hesitated as to what he should call the saddle-maker; thus far he had avoided any name.

"Honest Injun, I did. S'posin' ye call me Plunket, just plain Plunket, Son? That's as good a name as any, an' it's mine."

"Then your whole name's Bill Plunket?"

"The same."

"I like Plunket. How did you say I was goin' to earn my pony?"

"Didn't say; 't ain't safe sayin' wot I'll do or wot I ain't goin' to do — not just at present." He spoke solemnly, for his thoughts reverted at once to Jane. How would she take it? What would she say to another addition to the family, and he the son of a white man?

"When can I begin?"

"I dunno, Son, I dunno; I've got to think it out. But ye'll sure have the beast — mind that."

"An' a dog?"

"In course — a dog. Ye wouldn't be more'n half a boy 'thout a dog."

"What kind?"

"Can't tell ye that now. Wait till ye see my

kennel." He smiled to himself at the vision called up by that word. Each of his half-Indian babies possessed two puppies. McGillie, as he called his stepson, was the proud owner of three collies. He, himself, had two fox terriers and two powerful mongrels.

"P'r'aps McGillie will give me one of his; — collies you said." Bob was already intimate with the saddle-maker's stepson and his two babies, Tom and Jerry.

"Mebbe; I ain't sure. He sets a sight by 'em — st!" It was a note of warning.

Bob's short hair rose at the roots. There was audible above the gentle stirring of the great crowns of maple and sycamore a soft *pad, pad*, on the forest floor. The saddle-maker reached for his rifle.

"Lay low," he commanded the boy. Bob lay flat on the ground. The soft double tread came nearer. It ceased. Then, without warning, the forest silence was broken by wild yelps and quick sharp barkings. Two powerful dogs, half timber wolf, in their devouring eagerness to be near their long absent master sprang upon the saddle-maker with such force as partly to overpower him. He toppled half over.

"Ye damned beasts," he said gently, stroking them and quieting them with the words. "Ye found me out, hey? — Stay put, Son," he warned the boy; "the beasts have found ye out too. Let 'em snuff ye all over, smell ye, nose ye, turn ye clean over if they want to. It's their way o' satisfyin' theirselves ye ain't no stranger to me.

"Easy there, easy," he cautioned the dogs who were a trifle too rough in their investigations. "Ye

can set up now, Son, an' take notice, only don't touch 'em; just look 'em straight in the eye an' tell 'em to get out."

Bob sat up, with a weakened backbone however. He did as he was told: looked the huge beasts towering above him directly in the eyes and spoke in a low, quavering voice:

"G-get out."

The dogs stood irresolute. One of them flaired all over the boy's head; the other sat down on her haunches so near that her hot breath made Bob feel cold. In neither of them was there any evidence of obedience. This spirit of insubordination put Bob on his mettle.

"Get out." He spoke loudly, firmly.

The dog ceased snuffing; he, too, sat down on his haunches. The two stared impudently at the intruder. Bob felt the challenge; it made him furious. He sprang to his feet and shaking his fist under their very noses shouted with shrill vehemence:

"You damned beasts, get out!"

It was his final effort and his first half-oath; but he was only quoting the saddle-maker.

To the child's amazement the two dogs turned themselves about and meekly took their place on the other side of their master. Bob sensed a victory over brute creation. It was his first.

Bill Plunket grinned broadly and slapped his thighs. "That's the talk that does it, Son. Ye'll do, ye'll do. Master 'em first an' pet 'em afterwards. Ye won't have no more trouble with *them*. Come now, it's time to turn in. We've got a big day ahead of us to-morrow." He handed a blanket to the child.

"Will we be home to-morrow?"

"Yep." The answer was too laconic to invite further questioning.

Bob took his blanket and looked about for a special bedding-place on the forest floor. A few yards from the campfire, between two large white birches and a poplar, was a little "bush" of evergreens, rare in this locality. Within the clump was an open spot bedded deep with leaves and curiously hollowed as if it had been the lair of some wild animal. Bob announced his intention of sleeping there. He crept in under the low-spreading branches, dragging his blanket after him and, wrapping himself in it, settled into the hollow that was as if made for him.

"I've got a bully bed," he announced, rolling over on his back to observe what might be going on in the sky that could be seen between the birch crowns above the opening of the "bush." It looked to be a little space, not wider than the stretch of his arm; but all the same it was wonderful.

The saddle-maker made his own preparations to turn in. Soon he, too, rolled himself in his blanket and was ready for sleep. But sleep did not come so readily. He thought of Jane and the various domestic complications awaiting him. They were so near now, only eighteen hours distant, that they loomed large and forbidding before his night vision.

He was stretched out between the fire and the clump of evergreens. The dogs lay at his feet. Soon a small voice made itself heard from the "bush":

"I can see two big stars in the sky-hole right over my head."

"Mgh."

Another five minutes of forest quiet; then:

"Oo — ee, oo — ee, I say, Plunket, a big owl went across the sky-hole just this minute — hear him?"

The saddle-maker listened. Sure enough, he heard the flitting of the owl. He must not encourage too much conversation.

"Mgh."

The wind continued to move gently through the tree tops. A strong fresh woodsy scent mingled with the smoke from some charred sticks at the edge of the fire. Somewhere in the forest a thrush awoke and fluted brokenly a dream note.

"What's that?" This from Bob.

"A thrush. Now go to sleep, Son; it's time."

"I will — in a minute."

The saddle-maker waited for further developments. He knew something of this little human animal after six months' close companionship. At last:

"Plunket — "

"Mgh."

"Where's my Bunkie-nunc?"

The saddle-maker could not answer at once. For four months he had been dreading to hear this question from the boy. During that week in the dugout after his uncle's departure for the fort, Bob had asked the question almost hourly, although accepting the fact as stated by the saddle-maker that he had gone to the fort to get a team "to haul us out o' this 'ere hole", as he expressed it. After that week there were no more questions except those uttered in the delirium of fever. Since the boy's recovery he had asked nothing in regard to his uncle, had not once mentioned his name.

The saddle-maker concluded that the fever had burnt out that memory, destroyed the power of

remembrance of what had happened. He was glad if it were so; it was merciful; a child should not remember such things. He felt far from sure however. Now he must face the situation. It sickened him.

"Please tell me."

"Yer uncle's gone on a long trip, Son."

"Where?"

"I dunno." Bill Plunket swallowed hard; cleared his throat; fought with his conscience till he was weak. Then he spoke in a thickened voice:

"Son, I can't lie to ye, an', by God, I ain't goin' to try. Yer uncle can't get back from that trip — never —"

"Never —" The small voice from beneath the evergreens was lost in a hard-caught breath. The saddle-maker heard it. He winced at the sound.

"No, he can't. Ye see he —"

"Why — why not?" The voice was scarcely audible. The saddle-maker took his plunge.

"Ye see — he took the road us-all's got to take sometime, Son. He's — he's dead."

There was silence in the "bush." There was silence in the forest. The wind ceased for a moment to move the leafy crowns. Then came the sound of a strangled sob. It cut the saddle-maker to the heart but he knew what was before him: his duty to the boy.

"Son —"; he spoke softly. There was no answer, but again he heard the queer half-strangled sound at which one of the dogs raised her head.

"Son, yer uncle did the biggest thing a man, a reel man, can do — he saved us-all by givin' up his own life — 't wasn't easy for him — 't wasn't easy for me to keep livin' on when I knowed I owed my

just livin' to him. Don't ye never ferget, Son, he gave up his life for us-all —"

He listened for the sound that had roused the dog. He heard nothing for a moment; then the convulsive, choking, sobbing breaths came again to his ear, smothered this time as if the boy had hidden his head in his blanket to dull the sound.

The dog stirred uneasily, sat up on her haunches, listened intently in the direction of the sound; then crept towards the "bush."

The saddle-maker bit his lip to keep himself from crying. But he knew his duty.

"Son, the dog's comin' in to see ye (she'll comfort him," he muttered). "You know what yer uncle used to tell ye. 'Keep stiff upper lip, Bob, stiff upper lip.'" He waited a full minute.

"Yep —" The sound was still muffled.

"An' yer uncle was a *man*, Son, ye know that now —"

"Yep."

The dog crawled on her belly into the "bush."

"An' he was brave, I never knowed a braver; an' ye know it now —"

"Yep — hmf."

The saddle-maker heard the sniff and knew that the boy had taken his head from out the blanket. He heard the dog settling herself. He sighed relief as he waited.

From time to time a muffled sob came from the evergreens, followed by an uneasy movement of the dog. After a time the sounds grew less frequent. The wind was moving again softly through the tree tops. Finally his strained ears caught a slight noise as of the boy's turning; then came the voice:

"I'm goin' to — to keep — stiff upper lip, Plunket."

"Oh, you little cuss, you little cuss," said the saddle-maker, so gently, so lovingly that the boy was both comforted and encouraged.

"An' I'm goin' to be — be — like him."

"Yer beginnin' just right, Son, just right — keep right on — keep right on —"

There was a sound of some rearrangement of bodies within the "bush." Then silence.

The saddle-maker watched throughout that night — and his night thoughts were not of Jane.

At break of day he stepped softly to the bushes, knelt down and looked in. The dog was to all appearance asleep. Within her half encircling paws lay Bob curled against her body. The saddle-maker scarcely breathed; but the dog opened one eye, looked at him intelligently, closed it again and apparently fell asleep.

The saddle-maker crept back intending to snatch forty winks till sun-up.

"At Home"

I

Both man and boy were so worn out with the unwonted emotions of the night that they slept on till aroused by the dogs. They began the last lap of their journey three hours late. It was after sunset when they drew near the saddle-maker's home; but it was not dark for in the higher latitudes the after-light lingers so long.

The air was still. All sounds carried far. They approached the hut along a well worn trail through thick woods. The harsh cry of a night hawk sounded above them in the open. The dogs ran ahead and

out of sight many times, only to return, assure themselves that man, boy, and horse were still on the move, and be off again. Soon their strong bark was heard in the distance.

"Most home, Son." The saddle-maker spoke cheerfully, but at that moment the tone belied his feelings.

"Do you s'pose McGillie an' the collies will hear us?"

"Mebbe. He'll hear our dogs certain. Hear that?"

There was little need to ask, for above the roar of the big dogs could be heard the rapid fire of the terriers snapping and the yap-yap of the others. In a few minutes the huge mongrels came bounding back, raced by the rest. Behind them came running, half breathless, Colin McGillie.

The saddle-maker greeted him with a slap on the shoulder and a glad "How, Sonny!"

"P-pa — I th-thought — I —"

"Come, get yer wind first, McGillie."

"I thought sure ye'd gone for good an' all, Pa." There was a suspicious tremor in his voice. Colin was nearly fourteen.

"Thought that, did ye? I hadn't no idee o' playin' such a low-down trick as that. Glad to see the old man, hey?"

"Glad, Pa —"

The saddle-maker interrupted him. He felt he must save the situation. It would never do for Bob to think McGillie was a sissy:

"Here, Colin, these dogs are all mixed up with my legs. Get 'em out."

Colin yanked first one then another of the dogs out

of the saddle-maker's way until he had them well in hand; it was a vent for his emotions.

They walked on together, the dogs heeling well after their discipline. The saddle-maker brought about no introductions between the two boys; he wanted to restrain Colin's abnormal curiosity and to give Bob time to sense things. Finally he broke silence.

"How's things goin' to home, Colin?" It was a feeble question feebly put.

"Ain't goin'." Colin answered doggedly.

"Wot's up?"

"Jane's gone —"

"Jane? Where's she gone to?"

"Dunno."

"When did she make her start?"

"Last month; she'd a went sooner if it hadn't been for the snow."

"Hard winter, hey?"

"Turrible, Pa."

"How's Tom an' Jerry stood it?"

"All right. She took 'em 'long with her too."

"Took Tom an' Jerry, did she? Well, ye can't blame a mother for wantin' her babies 'long with her, can ye? Kinder lonesome 'thout 'em, hey?"

"You bet — took the puppies too."

"Puppies is as plenty as blackberries round in the mountains. How'd she carry 'em all?"

"She took the horse —"

"Took my horse, did she? Well, this is gettin' mighty int'restin'."

"— An' she took the best saddle, the one you an' her used to ride on."

"Best saddle — mm." The saddle-maker was

ruminating and spoke with exceeding mildness. Colin confided weeks afterwards to Bob that it riled him.

"Yup."

"How did Tom an' Jerry ride?"

"In them two saddle-bags o' yourn — one in each. I had saw her take 'em when I was layin' in the shed."

"Layin' in the shed? How's that?" For the first time the saddle-maker's voice had an edge to it.

"I slep' there all winter, an' I tell ye, Pa, I jumped on her when I had saw that. I swore at her awful, but she didn't care a darn. She fetched me a clip 'cross the jaw with a bridle strap — Gee! I thought 't was broke. I got a bunch there now; feel —"

The saddle-maker felt. His own feelings were of anger, relief, and disgust.

"Mgh." This monosyllable always acted with the promptness and restraint of an electric air-brake on McGillie's conversation. Bob had taken in all of this strange colloquy according to the capacity of his ears and years.

The procession moved on in silence — the dogs still heeling. After leaving the woods they crossed a little clearing, all waving grassland and sweet with grassy smells. They drew up before an unlighted hut. It was already dusk.

"I'll bed the horse first. He's played out for he's carried double most o' the time. This 'ere is Bob Collamore, McGillie; he's come to live with us-all. He's come clear from the Missouri. He'll need some showin' round to-morrow."

The two boys felt there was no use in trying to size each other up; that must wait for daylight and the morrow.

"You've got some bully puppies, McGillie. Plunket said mebbe — only mebbe, you know — you'd give me one." The tone was wistful, but it was not an auspicious opening for the new acquaintance. McGillie loved his dogs as only a boy who has brought them up from birth through puppyhood can love them. Without replying to the unpleasant insinuation of the forthcoming gift, he accepted the compliment implied in the term "bully."

"I'm goin' to have some more bimeby. Mebbe, I dunno, I'll let ye bring one up."

This offer was generous, and Bob answered accordingly:

"I'd love to bring up a puppy."

"I sell 'em, ye know."

Bob did not know, but he had to say something.

"Oh, you do?" There was a note of keen disappointment in the boy's voice; but he was game. "Anyway, Plunket said I could earn a pony — of my own too; an' I guess if I can earn a pony I can earn a puppy."

There was fine contempt in the tone with which he spoke the last word. Hearing it Colin McGillie suddenly weakened; he felt, at that moment, that the unborn puppies when six months old wouldn't bring ten cents apiece.

"Oh, we can make a trade all right. What'd Pa say —"

The saddle-maker coming from the shed interrupted him.

"Where's the fodder?" He spoke peremptorily.

"Ain't any. She took all there was left."

"An' I s'pose she took Hannah too? I don't see her." Hannah was his mule.

"Yup, an' she took all the pullets, an' the last bag o' grain —"

"Anything left?" There was now sarcasm in the questions.

"Not much. She took the two big blankets, an' the red an' yaller quilts, an' all her own fixin's, an' some pots an' kettles — the big brass one too."

"Reg'lar weddin' outfit — Oh, Lord, Lord!"

The saddle-maker sat down suddenly among the waving grass and began to laugh; he laughed so long and so heartily that finally he rolled over exhausted on his back. After a long-drawn *hah* of relief, he sat up and spoke to the boys who being unable to see any joke could not join in the laugh, and had to content themselves with wondering at such antics in a man of his years.

"Boys, hear wot the old man says: better not get married; but if ye do, let me tell ye just one thing: a woman'll say 'wot's his is mine, an' wot's mine's my own', every time; an' don't ye forget it. Now let's have a fire and get some feed to start in housekeepin' on. Son an' me has some left over."

He opened the door of the hut and striking a match touched it to a long strip of birch bark he had brought in from the shed; he dropped it into the box stove. McGillie came in with some wood. In a few minutes the hut was thoroughly warm, the bacon sizzling in the pan, the compliments of a few ancient hens, — some fresh eggs that McGillie had saved, — frying in the fat, the kettle boiling, and the tin teapot doing its full duty. A kerosene lamp gave them light. McGillie assured his stepfather with considerable

complacency that Jane had not taken the oil can; in fact she couldn't, he said, because he had hidden it in the hollow of the big poplar.

When they had eaten to their satisfaction, the blankets were spread on the floor and the saddle-maker smoked in silence with McGillie on one side, Bob on the other close to his arm. The dogs, all seven of them, were in various attitudes around the stove. The warmth was grateful to man and beast, for the early June nights on the mountain are apt to be unpleasantly chill.

Presently the saddle-maker, who was lost in thought, felt the lunge of a small body against his arm; it was Bob tired out with the excitement of the new, and now overcome suddenly with sleep. He put his arm around the little lad, and lifting the boy's inert sleep-filled body in his arms laid the child carefully on a buffalo robe in one corner and covered him with the blanket. The big bitch, remembering her charge of the night before, followed him to watch proceedings.

While he was tucking the blanket behind the child's back, Bob roused up sufficiently to murmur, "Where's the dog?"

"Right here, Son."

Bob half opened his eyes. Sure enough the dog was there. He put out his hand; the great beast licked it, then settled noiselessly on the robe at the boy's feet.

"An' she's yourn, Son, for this world an' the next," the saddle-maker said solemnly.

Bob smiled sleepily; he could not take in the fact of the gift; he was too far gone.

"Good-night, Plunket."

2

Bill Plunket and his stepson sat up for another half hour. McGillie was curious about the new boy, and the saddle-maker realized this. He felt it was wise to tell him just as things had been in the past six months that he might not be induced, through sheer curiosity, to question Bob and by so doing unwittingly open up wounds that otherwise might have healed. He wanted to spare the child; he wanted him to forget the past.

"I want ye to help him to forget, Colin. He's been through as much as some men o' forty. He's got grit, an' he's good comp'ny. I want ye to stand by him through thick an' thin."

McGillie winked hard. He was taking it all in, but his part Scotch inheritance made him unready to cry halves with anybody at the first go. The saddle-maker knew his ways and did not press for promises or even assurance on his part. He proceeded to do some questioning along his line of special thought.

"McGillie, Jane ain't gone to the mountain Injuns, has she? They ain't said nothin' 'bout her, have they?"

"Nope. I have saw 'em two-three times since she went. They come by the other day with a whole string o' ponies, but they never said nothin' 'cept Kinni-kinnik's pa. He asked me if I had 'nough to eat."

"Did ye?"

"Yep. I done some trappin' this winter, and that kep' us-all in meat. But there warn't no shootin', the snow was so deep. An' I had a little meal and rice, an' a peck o' dried berries Jane fixed last fall — an' some maple sugar."

"Ye done well, Sonny, ye done well; an' we-all will be gettin' to housekeepin' reg'lar soon. We can get along for a spell 'thout Jane."

Colin McGillie nodded emphatically although, like Bob, he was overcome with sleep. Seeing which, Bill Plunket emptied his pipe and trod out the fire.

"Time to turn in, McGillie. Ye needn't have nothin' special on yer mind now I'm back; — just sleep it out."

McGillie needed no urging, but he asked one more question before he went to sleep:

"Pa — did ye mean what ye said 'bout givin' that boy yer dog?"

"I sure did. Don't I gen'rally mean what I say?"

"Yup — but —"

"But wot? Out with it. Ye don't want to sleep on it, McGillie; mebbe 't wouldn't set well on yer stomach."

"But she's yourn; ye think a sight o' her, an' —"

"An' wot?"

"An' ye see, Pa, seein' ye set so by her, if ye don't *reelly* want ter give her up, I'll give him one o' my collies." It was out at last.

"Shut up, Colin McGillie; go to sleep — an' keep yer dog."

But how gentle his voice! So gentle, that Colin McGillie looking up at him gratefully, — for the contemplated sacrifice of his dog on the altar of his love for his stepfather had cost him a fearsome struggle, — as he bent over his bed of skins and drew the blanket over his shoulder, blurted his heart out then and there:

"Gosh, it's mighty good to get ye back, Pa, after

all Jane's jawin'. I hung on, Pa, I hung on for dear life."

"I bet ye did, an' I'm mighty glad to be back, my son." He thought it not wise to add "'thout Jane's jawin'."

McGillie appreciated to the full that "my son." "McGillie" and "Colin" were his daily food, "Sonny" whenever the saddle-maker returned from his annual trips; but "my son" — his stepfather had called him that but once before, on the night after his mother died. He felt rewarded for all the trials of the past winter. He worshipped the saddle-maker, but the Indian strain in him would give that worship no verbal expression.

When both boys and all the dogs had been sleeping soundly for an hour the saddle-maker opened the door of the hut and stepped out, closing it behind him. He wanted to be alone with the night and think out the new proposition life had laid so unexpectedly before him.

The Beginning of Friendships

I

During the first year in the new environment, it seemed as if Bob's senses of sight, hearing, touch became from day to day almost abnormally keen. It was apparent to the saddle-maker, at the end of those twelve months, that the boy had acquired what may best be defined as a sixth sense. This extra sense of acquisitiveness was developed by his constant association with their Indian neighbors.

There were not so many of them — a mere remnant of the Crees that had remained in this wilderness of the Turtle Mountain. But from time to time they

were visited by some of the more northern Crees, famous Hudson's Bay Company hunters and trappers from the Great Lakes country south of the Saskatchewan delta.

Now and then a few Chippewa, their next of kin, — and like them "timber Indians", — from far away Bemidji and all that region of hills, lakes, and pine forests in Minnesota, made pilgrimage to their old altars in these mountain fastnesses, or visited for a month or season with their friends and relatives among the Crees.

Once, once only, it was given to Bob Collamore to see Crees and Chippewa, their priests and sun-lodges, — a mere remnant of older days, — gathering from all the land between Hudson's Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, in order to hold the famous Sun Ceremony in this, their temple in the wilderness.

Once, only once, he was privileged to see "the swinging lope of the great war bands, the gleam of lance and eagle-plume flutter", filing down its slopes; and once to hear their far-off chants — only once. But the wonders of that day, the sound of those chants — he could relive and hear them whenever he closed his eyes to dream back to the time when the fading glory of the old Indians' days and ways, like the autumn leafage of their own north country, shone with a new splendor or ever their final vanishing before the killing frost of modernity.

2

Just how or when Bob's intimacy with their red neighbors had come about the saddle-maker failed to comprehend. Looking back over the first few months of the boy's life with him in the mountains, he could not place his finger on any special event, on

any one date that afforded him any explanation of the extraordinarily friendly relations which were so soon established between the Indians and the boy.

For two weeks after Plunket's return to his squawless hut, they avoided being seen in its vicinity. Knowing them, their ways, and outlook on the daily happenings of life, he understood their attitude of mind towards him in his peculiar marital circumstances, and their consequent avoidance of him — a white man whose squaw had ignominiously left him. Had he sought and found her, compelled her by threats and force and a good drubbing to return to him, they would have respected him, come to chat and gossip with him as was their wont. Although they did not allow themselves to be seen or heard, the saddle-maker knew they were aware of his every move, that they had also seen the coming of the boy. And, knowing that they knew he sat alone, working as usual, passive in the face of the fact that his good horse and mule had been taken from him, patient under such severe petticoat discipline, he also knew that in their Indian hearts they despised him whom they called friend.

He knew all this; but that first night of his homecoming he laid out his present and future line of action so far as Jane was concerned; thought it out carefully in detail, and decided to hold it for so long as he might see fit. Of course he knew that by this time every Indian in the Turtle Mountains was aware of the trick Jane had played on him, — their masterful system of communication, that approaches wireless telegraphy, was well known to him, — that they knew whither she had gone and where she was; but he purposed asking no questions. He was, in a

manner, Indian bred: he could wait, he had a talent for that; he could also match them at their own game.

But the boys could have told him tales! Tales that would have enlightened him on the subject of Bob's friendliness with their Indian neighbors. Oh, yes, they could have told; only, being boys, they did not choose to give themselves and their secrets away to anyone.

3

The boy's curiosity to see some real Indians was boundless; up to this time he had seen only the scouts, much like other men, at the fort. But the saddle-maker had forbidden both boys to go to the villages or camps. He was biding his time, and the boys might bring his plans through heedlessness to naught.

"Don't ye have no truck with 'em, boys. Keep to yerselves an' they'll keep their own trail."

The saddle-maker as he spoke was adjusting a small yoke, exactly like a sap-bucket yoke, to Bob's thin shoulders. He made it in order that the boy according to his strength might help McGillie fetch water from the spring. Formerly the mule performed this service. Now that he was muleless and the cavalry horse from the fort incapacitated for the steep trails, the boys were to be water-carriers, at least, for a time.

"But, Pa, what'll we do if we sight 'em? They won't know what us-all means not speakin' to 'em; they'll be madder'n hornets."

"Ye do wot I tell ye: lay low an' let 'em alone. Ye hear?"

"Yup, but —"

"None o' yer 'buts', Colin; 't ain't no use to but in with yer 'buts' when the old man says the word — is it now?"

"Nope, but Pa —"

"Get on with ye," said the saddle-maker gently but very firmly.

McGillie put on his yoke. "'T ain't no use," he muttered as he strode away, pails swinging and rattling, "if Pa once gets set, he's set; pitch pine on yer leggins ain't in it with him." He flung along rapidly, still muttering. Bob trotted on behind jingling his two small pails in imitation of McGillie. The dogs were not allowed to go with them because they were liable to rile the water.

After sprinting half a mile in this mood, McGillie felt better, also the need of companionship. He looked around for Bob who was some distance behind and nearly winded. He halted.

"Got yer wind, Bob?"

"I've — *hah* — I've got it — *hah* —"

McGillie smiled in a superior way at such softness.

"This ain't nothin'; wait till ye have to go fifteen miles winters lookin' after yer traps."

"How far is it to the spring now?"

"'Bout half a mile."

"It'll be dark 'fore we get back, won't it?" It was Bob's first trip to the spring.

"Scairt?" McGillie's tone was not acceptable to Bob.

"Scairt o' wot?" His tone was loud and defiant. The boy was falling into the speech of his two friends.

"Oh, things —"

"What things?"

"Injuns, mebbe; mebbe wild cats. I have saw a bear close to the spring once."

A twig snapped; Bob jumped. Fortunately McGillie's head was turned away at that moment.

The long light of the summer solstice evening permeated the darkening woods that were filled with song of thrush, and vireo, of oriole and robin. The boys had started late because the heat of the day had been so great. Now and then a breath of air, that had lingered in some draughtless forest pocket, puffed out upon them, bringing with it the pungent aroma of the woods.

"When does the trail to the spring begin?" was Bob's next query.

"Piece ahead; it's steep, but I'll trail ye."

"I'll trail myself," muttered Bob.

In a few minutes McGillie turned to the left and into the spring trail. It followed the steep slope of the hillside; it was narrow but well worn. On each side was a dense coppice of scrub oaks.

"It ain't so awful steep," said Bob, slipping at that moment on a loose piece of rock.

"Kick that out to one side; that's the way men do on the trail." McGillie spoke carelessly.

Bob stopped to kick, and kicked so mightily that his moccasinned toes felt bruised and unjointed, especially his big one. He bit his lip, jack-knifed his body, and with both hands nursed his toes over his left knee.

McGillie snickered. "That'll learn ye not to kick rocks with moccasins, Softy."

It was too much. Suddenly Bob punched him one in the back. McGillie turned on him. At that moment both boys caught the muffled sound of hoofs above them on the main trail.

"Injuns!" whispered McGillie in a sepulchral tone, simulating terror.

Bob could think of nothing to say but "By gosh!" At least, it sounded brave and might deceive McGillie.

"Get into the bush, an' don't ye make a noise with them pails on yer life," was McGillie's next order carried out promptly and effectively by Bob, except for the pails. He forgot to remove his yoke as he dashed into the bush. McGillie would not caution him about it for he felt he owed "Softy" one for that punch in his back. He meant to scare him blue with the Indians, and then play the rescuer in a grand manner. After noiselessly disentangling the yoke and pails, he crawled in after him.

"Where are they?" whispered Bob.

"Up above on the big trail."

"Will they come down here?"

"'Course, Greeny; to water their ponies; there's dozens o' 'em."

"Dozens? Are, are they — I mean the Indians — awful fierce?"

McGillie suppressed a laugh. "Most o' 'em — but these ain't. I'd go out and talk to 'em, only I daren't after what Pa said."

"Can you talk English with 'em?"

"Wot yer givin' me? They talk Injun."

So McGillie could talk "Injun." This fact impressed Bob; he determined to learn that language. He was not to be outdone by Colin McGillie!

For the moment all was quiet above them; only the birds were singing as if mad with the midsummer joy. For a moment Bob forgot the Indians; he was plotting revenge. He owed McGillie "another" for calling him "Greeny." He made up his mind if

all went well to give McGillie a scare he wouldn't get over before winter. His own gooseflesh was gradually subsiding.

"I guess you can't fool with them much, can you?" Bob's whisper was very low. McGillie took the bait at once.

"Wot d'ye know 'bout 'em! They're chock full o' kinks an' fun like us-all. Injuns have jokes like we-all do. I've heard 'em laughin' their heads off most — Shut up," he whispered suddenly, forgetting he was spokesman, "an' watch out."

It was dusk among the bushes but twilight on the trail. They heard the ponies entering it.

It was one of the big events as it was also the keenest disappointment in Bob's short life — that first sight of "real" Indians. He had pictured them, like all children of vivid imagination, as braves in war paint, and war bonnets, with, possibly, a scalp or two for belt and ornament. The more suggestively awful to the child-mind is always the more fascinating and alluring.

"Here they come; lay low," whispered McGillie.

Shambling down the steep trail came the ponies, eight or more. The Indians sat them carelessly, limbs, shoulders, heads relaxed, scenting no lurking danger, at peace with themselves and the world in the refreshing cool of the evening. They lopped up and down as if they were a corporate part of their ponies' anatomy — a set of ill-clad, unkempt, innocent, dirty men. Riding so in silence, taking their ease, they looked to be half asleep.

Suddenly into their twilight meditations, into the midst of their ponies' legs, shot one after the other, with banging clang and clatter, Bob's two tin pails.

There followed rearing and bucking, frantic side-stepping into the coppice, a crowding of terrified bodies, bewilderment for a second on the part of the Indians, confusion of man and beast in the indefinite twilight, yells, imprecations, spurts of tin-pail resonance as the successive hoofs madly spurned the rolling unseen pails; then terrified snorts, shouts, a wild switching of tails — the stampede! The whole cavalcade bolted and tore madly down the hill. On they ran, galloped, leaped, trying to pass one another by twos and threes on the narrow trail — stumbling, clattering.

The troop disappeared. From a distance came a faint outcry. The Indians had been routed by what they knew not.

McGillie, emerging from his covert, picked up a few yards down the trail a battered tin pail. Bob crawled out to look about him.

"Wot in thunder did ye do that for?" McGillie appeared to be dumfounded.

"I wanted to see if they could take a joke," said Bob innocently.

They picked up their yokes and cautiously made their way down to the spring where they found the other pail intact. No Indians in sight. McGillie filled the three pails and put stones in the battered one in order to balance Bob. In silence they climbed the hill.

It was not until they had made three fourths of their way home, still in silence, that McGillie saw through the joke. Suddenly he set down his pails; he had seen through it at last and what he saw proved too much for him. He rolled over and over on the ground, laughing till his jaws and stomach ached. Bob

smiled in the dark and kicked his heels in perfect enjoyment of his success.

McGillie arrived at the hut in a weakened condition but carried in the water. Bob hid the battered pail beneath the underpinning of the shed.

That evening when the saddle-maker had gone out for his bedtime smoke, McGillie whispered to Bob:

"Say, Bob —"

"What?"

"I won't never call you Softy again, honest Injun."

"You'd better not. — How's your back feel, McGillie?"

"All right." Then: "Better not let Pa know anything 'bout this scrape —"

"Never," said Bob firmly.

4

A few weeks afterwards it was known among the Indians of the village to the south, and the more distant one to the north, that Kinni-kinnik's father and his chums had been put to rout by the white man's child. Often of an evening, about that time, in the various tepees, or among the groups around smouldering campfires, might have been heard the sound of hearty laughter, loud guffaws, the cackle of children, the merry chatter of squaws — the story of Kinni-kinnik's father and the Little Owl, as the men had already christened Bob because of his having been, unseen but seeing, at twilight in the bush, was being told with great gusto by one or another of the routed ones.

It followed naturally enough that those who heard of this exploit wanted to see the originator. Hence the Indians' visits to the saddle-maker's were resumed, Little Owl's friends multiplied rapidly, and the embargo on the boys' return visits was removed.

Kinni-kinnik

I

It was love at sight, Bob's first meeting with Kinni-kinnik. She was called that because once, when she was a mere baby and just trying her unsteady feet, her grandfather, the medicine-man, to his great delight had found her in his tepee sucking away at his ceremonial pipe. And finding her so engaged, he nicknamed her then and there after the delicate inner cortex of the red willow which of old he and his tribe used to smoke before tobacco was abundant. Her real name, however, was Osamequon, betokening something of the grace of a little feather.

It was McGillie who was responsible for the acquaintance.

Bob had been thinking hard for a month as to ways and means by which he might earn an old rifle that McGillie had discarded when his stepfather gave him a new one, just before setting out on his disastrous trading-trip. In many of his characteristics McGillie was more Scotch than Indian. To what was his he held on like grim death, and nothing short of a trade could induce him to part with a possession. The old rifle was his, and he had no idea of giving it to Bob.

The boy so longed for its possession that he tormented McGillie by plying him with questions about the weapon, and so persistently day after day, that in desperation McGillie set his slow-moving wits at work to formulate some scheme by which he might part with the gun on the basis of a good trade. When he failed to solve the problem satisfactorily he consulted the saddle-maker.

"Ye see, Pa, it ain't as if he could *do* things. He's

soft — don't know enough to take up a skunk by the tail. But he pesters me turrible, Pa; kinder bores in under yer skin like a sheep-tick. If I have to stand it much longer I'll sure be plumb loco. Now if he could *do* somp'in', mebbe I could trade — make him earn it, ye know. But wot can he do?"

"He can talk, Colin."

"Ye bet he can." McGillie's assent was so solemn that a broad smile deepened the crows' feet about Plunket's eyes. "But I ain't goin' to let him talk me into givin' him my rifle, not by a long shot."

"An' he can read —"

"Bet he can," McGillie nodded emphatically. "He can read the Book. Say, Pa, it's mighty int'restin' hearin' 'bout them tribes an' their wars, an' their settin' up altars an' killin' beasts for sacrifices, an' runnin' a he-goat out o' their camps thinkin' he's carryin' their sins off with him. They fit awful too — worse'n the Injuns any day."

"It's just as ye say, Colin: mighty int'restin' readin'. Ye see, the Book is wise, an' the boy that reads it ain't a fool."

"Not on yer life!" McGillie spoke almost with enthusiasm.

"An' he can write too; makes his *t*'s straight as a gun barrel an' crosses 'em like a crossbar, dots his *i*'s clear an' round like a bull's eye on a target, an' twists his *g*'s with a reg'lar round-up loop. Just let him get hold of a rifle an' a pony, an' he'll go the whole figger — an' some more."

"Gee, I wish I could write like he does; then I could make up the letters for the Injuns they send to the traders and agents; they pay good for 'em."

"I wish ye could, Colin. I ain't no learnin' that-

away, so I ain't been able to help ye to wot folks call eddication; but *he* could."

The saddle-maker knew naught of the modern science of "suggestion", but he had practical working knowledge with men and animals of what a thought can accomplish if expressed suggestively, either in word or action, at the fit moment to man or beast. Knowing this, he waited for his words to get beneath the surface.

Shortly an illuminating thought showed in McGillie's pale blue eyes. He spoke eagerly:

"I say, Pa, I've got it."

"Got wot?"

"How I can trade with Bob for that rifle. Ye s-s-see, I-I c-can't —"

"Take it easy, Colin," said the saddle-maker kindly, for the unwonted excitation of McGillie's brain-matter had caused his childhood's weakness to re-appear in full form. "Ye've trapped an idea, and it ain't goin' to get away from ye. Try again."

McGillie obediently drew a long breath,—following a method the saddle-maker with much patience had taught him in order that he might overcome the physical handicap in speech, — and began again, but very slowly, carrying all he wished to say in the one exhalation:

"I can't write, an' I can't read only little words; an' if he'll learn me how to write an' read in that Book, — it's got a heap o' words 'bout lots o' things, — I can write for the Injuns an' get pay for it."

"That's wot I was thinkin' myself, Colin —"

"Why didn't ye tell me then?"

Bill Plunket smiled indulgently at his stepson's indignant protest. He knew, as he had said once

to the boy's mother, that McGillie would never set the river afire; but for all that he was a fine lad. For years his stepfather had used his own unlearned method in developing the slow-moving mind, so inducing it to depend on itself. As a result there was, of his age, no keener eye, no better trapper, no surer shot, among all Plunket's acquaintance in the mountains and on the plains. He answered the boy accordingly.

"Thought ye'd work it out for yerself, McGillie, if I let ye chew on it long enough."

"How long d' ye s'pose it'll be 'fore I can write letters for the Injuns?"

"I dunno; a year, mebbe —"

"A year!" There was both disgust and disappointment in McGillie's voice. "He won't wait no year for that rifle, Pa."

"That's wot I was thinkin'. Mebbe ye can trade with him on wot they call the instalment plan."

"Wot's that?"

"Hand over the rifle to him now — this very day — an' ye'll be rid of the pesterin'. Let him use it. Learn him to shoot, an' shoot straight. Let the boy have the good of it while he wants it so bad. An' make a bargain with him that he'll give ye writin' lessons twice a week, an' teach ye readin' every day ye're to home. How's that? I'll witness the trade."

"That's all right. I'll go an' clean it for him."

The plan worked, better even than McGillie anticipated — better, that is, for Bob.

2

For the next few days Bob was not parted in the flesh from his rifle. It was his second possession. As for his first, the big bitch, she was always with him.

McGillie's stolid nerves became at last slightly affected by Bob's complete absorption in his weapon to the consequent ignoring of himself, as well as by the aimless and endless shooting and banging at an improvised target behind the hut. In consequence he proposed to the saddle-maker that if he would lend him the horse, he could take the boy with him along the north trail to the Indian village, eight miles distant, and, on the way, let him try out his gun on something real if only a stump. The saddle-maker promptly gave permission. He knew the embargo on visiting the Indians was irksome to McGillie — for they were friends — and breeding an inordinate curiosity in Bob.

"I'd trust him with you, McGillie, anywhere in the mountains; but," he added with a knowing twinkle in his eye, "I dunno as I can trust ye with him. Hear to me: let him do the trailing, McGillie, that rifle is liable of a sudden to point most all ways. Ye hear wot I say?"

McGillie promised extreme caution. As a matter of fact he went so far in this direction that, all unknown to Bob, he emptied the rifle of its contents before starting out. . . .

"I wish I could speak Injun like you," said Bob discontentedly. They were nearing the few tepees and huts dignified by the name of village.

"Ye'll learn it hearin' 'em."

"What do I say when I see 'em?"

"Say 'How.'"

"How," said Bob, trying to imitate the unnatural guttural; "how — how — h —" He stopped short to stare speechless.

The trail led unexpectedly into a clearing. In

front of him, against a background of poplar and birch, was a tepee: and in front of the tepee, with the opening for a background, stood three pappooses.

One, a girl of seven, was holding a baby boy of two by the hand. Close beside her stood another boy of three or four. Both little ones were in gala dress, having borrowed some of the family finery in the matter of their father's feather war bonnets to play "grown-up", even as do their little white brothers. Their small round faces were partly hidden by this brilliant headgear. The little maid wore a long skirt and blouse. Her dark brown hair was banded fillet-like about her head. Rich red showed beneath the light copper of her cheeks. The slight, yet rounded form, was exceedingly graceful in line. The dark eyes, shy but earnest, were fixed on Bob.

"That's Kinni-kinnik and her brothers," said McGillie. He hailed them in their own language, and springing forward to meet them left Bob to shift for himself — a procedure wholly foreign to the boy's sociable code. He continued to stare at Kinni-kinnik.

She was without exception the prettiest thing in animate nature, whether human or otherwise, he had ever seen. And how glad she was to see McGillie! How fast they were chattering together! Suddenly Bob felt he was left out in the cold, a miserable enough feeling peculiar to childhood. Its intensity is measured by the degree of susceptibility in the child nature, and this special child's nature was of a susceptibility so intense, so spasmodic, as well as sporadic, that, at times, it amounted almost to weakness.

After a few minutes the boy became so wretched

that he got mad through and through; and what with his rage at McGillie for playing him what he called a low-down trick, and his momentary sense of spiritual isolation from the rest of childhood, for he realized he could neither understand them nor make himself understood, he presented to the little hostess of the wigwam a pity-awakening figure. She turned from McGillie and disappeared in the tepee. With her vanishing it was as if the sun had set at midday for Bob.

It was a small boy's first love, — many a man looks back upon his own with a tenderness unlike any called forth by later experience, — and it was destined to feed certain springs of life which by reason of a hard-conditioned childhood had almost failed the boy when his mother died and, seemingly, gone wholly dry since the death of his uncle. It being a requisite of normal child-life that it find sustenance in the affections and full development by means of them, this matter of a boy's first little love is never to be treated lightly.

When Kinni-kinnik reappeared she was carrying a diminutive cradle-board. On it, strapped on a tiny cushion and covered with a small gayly colored Indian blanket, lay a sleepy two-months'-old puppy, blinking idiotically. A bright beaded band of red flannel about his tan-colored head heightened the effect of complete lunacy. McGillie laughed loud at the sight.

"You'll laugh t' other side o' your face 'fore I get through with you."

This sudden growl from Bob sobered McGillie. It dawned upon him that he had gone a little too far in ignoring the boy. But he excused himself for

this: who could think of any one else when Kinni-kinnik, his pet from her babyhood, was in evidence? He determined to make amends.

"Say, Bob, Kinni-kinnik wants to show ye her puppy she plays doll with." He interpreted to Kinni-kinnik.

The little maid walked up to Bob and gravely presented him with the cradle-board. The boy held out his hands. She laid the board on his opened palms.

There were tears in the boy's eyes, but he set his jaw to keep them from spilling over. How the little Indian girl interpreted those tears Bob never knew. He heard McGillie speaking:

"She wants ye to set down."

Bob dropped in the grass, Kinni-kinnik settling in front of him with the lightness of an eider duck's feather. The small brothers squatted on their heels near their sister, although the baby lost his equilibrium several times during the process and was restored to it by Kinni-kinnik. Then Kinni-kinnik began to question Bob, McGillie acting as interpreter.

"She wants to know if ye've got a father?"

Bob hated to be dependent for his speech on McGillie, especially in the circumstances; he wanted to do the answering himself. He felt choked, but he spoke sharply:

"You make me the Injun sign for 'dead.'" McGillie obeyed.

Bob laid the cradle-board and puppy on the grass. With the peculiarly graceful waving movement of the one hand under and over the other, then upward and skyward, he answered her:

"Dead."

"Got a mother?" McGillie continued to translate.

Again that expressive motion of the boy's hands. Kinni-kinnik's eyes widened in pity as she continued to gaze steadily at the white boy facing her.

"Any brothers and sisters?"

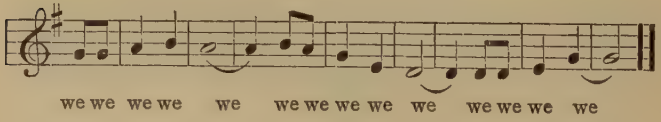
For the third time the boy's hand went through the same motions.

"A grandfather?"

Bob shook his head.

"Cousins, aunts, uncles?"

Another vigorous shake in the negative. Kinni-kinnik failed to grasp the significance of these facts: a white boy without these relations which make the normal life and environment for an Indian child! And failing to comprehend this, she proceeded to action along lines she thoroughly understood. Stretching out her legs on the grass, she took up the cradle-board and balancing it on her toes and knees, as she had seen her mother do so many times, began to croon a lullaby, moving her feet in such wise that the balanced board swayed slightly, swinging rhythmically with her song:



Over and over she sang it, so softly, so tenderly, like the little red mother she was, that the blinking puppy ceased to blink, and the small brothers fell asleep — the baby tumbling over in the grass half lost in his father's war bonnet, the other lying with his head against his sister's arm.

And Bob? Unknown to himself, unknown to Kinni-kinnik, undreamed of by McGillie, Bob was being comforted for the loss of family affection, keenly felt by him without his being conscious of the meaning of that loss. They did not talk. It was a new experience for the boy to enjoy companionship without speech. He learned that day something of the "Indian silence". . .

When, at last, the trees began to cast long shadows on the grass, the bitch rose up suddenly from Bob's side, listening, alert. At the same moment Kinni-kinnik and the boys were aware of a distant subdued tumult in the woods. The bitch let loose a prolonged roar; it was answered by the discordant yelping of a dozen or more Indian curs, the advance couriers of the family home-coming.

"They're comin', the whole kit! Ye'll see 'em all now — all them relations ye ain't got," said McGillie, his voice betraying an undercurrent of excitement.

Without ceremony Kinni-kinnik kicked off the cradle-board and puppy, shook the two babies broad awake, clapped the big war bonnets over their heads, and dragging each by a hand attempted to run towards the woods.

"Gosh, ye can't get ahead o' her." McGillie spoke with admiration. Bob was silent. "Ye'll see *some* Injuns, I can tell ye."

The boy listened, looked, and waited, tense with the prospect of a new excitement.

3

It was, in truth, a family party that dribbled out of the woods into the open — ponies, squaws, dogs, men, a boy or two, one after the other, to the accom-

paniment of old sleigh bells, yelping of curs, clatter of pails, chatter and laughter.

A squaw slipped from her pony and caught up her baby, kissing him all over his face. It was Kinni-kinnik's mother, Jane's sister. Kinni-kinnik said something to her. The woman looked in Bob's direction, but askance at him. The little girl caught at her mother's hand as if urging her to come and make the white boy's acquaintance. But the squaw balked and answered shortly. McGillie nudged Bob.

"We'd better be gettin' out o' here. Injuns don't want no white boy, that's a stranger to 'em, round when they're goin' to have a reg'lar big feed. Look at them rabbits, — they've got dozens, I'll bet, — and see them maskinonge!"

Bob needed no word of encouragement from McGillie to look at anything, for he was taking note of everything in sight.

"Who's the old squaw gettin' off her pony, the one with the bunch o' rabbit skins?"

"That's Kinni-kinnik's grandfather's aunt, old Flyin' Loon. She's most a hundred. She don't make friends with no whites, let me tell ye; she's a reg'lar wildcat with whites." This was a stretch of imagination on McGillie's part; but it impressed Bob, as he intended it should.

"Who's that behind her?"

"He's Carmastic, the medicine-man, an' Flyin' Loon is his aunt — he's Kinni-kinnik's grandfather, an' the boy behind him is one o' Kinni-kinnik's cousins. He feels mighty big 'count o' his bein' a big chief's great-grandson. The big chief was Flyin' Loon's brother and the medicine-man's father." He twitched Bob's shirt sleeve. "See there — the

man just comin' out o' the woods an' catchin' up the little 'un on his pony? He's Kinni-kinnik's father — an' he's seen ye, Bob; he's lookin' at ye."

They were fine looking men, these Crees of the Border. They were lighter colored than their brothers of other tribes, with noticeably regular features, keen, intelligent eyes, the lines about the mouth firm, clearly cut, bespeaking earnestness, straight firm noses expressive of will; and about mouth or nostrils not a line indicative of cruelty or savagery. They were faces to be trusted. They were friends on whom a man, white or of their own race, might count when once their friendship was given. The white boy sensed something of this, and a boy's instinct for a man's friendship is much like a dog's — very generally reliable.

Kinni-kinnik was catching at her father's hand as she had caught at her mother's, and talking earnestly and eagerly to him and the old medicine-man. The two men, Kinni-kinnik between them still holding her father's hand and chatting freely, came over to the boys.

The child's father spoke to McGillie, and then in silence took a long, searching look at Bob. But the medicine-man, drawing still nearer to the boy, held out his hand, speaking his own language which McGillie interpreted:

"My son, you are welcome among your red brothers."

Bob, looking up into the keen undimmed eyes, looking down again at the slender wrist, the thin long-fingered hand, gave then and there to this Indian his whole-hearted allegiance, his whole trust, gave it at once and absolutely. Placing his hand in

the Indian's outstretched one, he said in the best imitation of McGillie of which he was capable:

"How, Carmastic."

Kinni-kinnik's father grunted approval, and the little maid, shy pleasure in her brown eyes, took the hand she was still holding and catching up Bob's left laid it within her father's.

So the bond was cemented — through Kinni-kinnik.

4

They waited long enough to see the campfire lighted, the big kettle of water put over it to boil, the rabbits skinned and put in to stew; then they went homewards along the darkening north trail.

Influences

1

Chum, Carmastic, Flying Loon, Kinni-kinnik and her brothers, these became his life friends; but it was three years before he could speak easily with them in their own tongue, and a year after McGillie had gone into the far north, to the Great Lakes region of Manitoba to trap for one of the Hudson's Bay Company's posts in that region.

With the medicine-man's grandson, whom he called Chum because he was his Indian intimate, he hunted, trapped, fished, and learned to ride, when at last he possessed a pony, as Indians ride. He became like an Indian boy in his method of wild-thing warfare. But it was through the children he was initiated into the ways of Indian family life, given the freedom of the tepee, permitted to play their games with their mother. In time he acquired their language. He learned their songs, their dances. He was much with them, for Kinni-kinnik was the lodestone that drew him often

over the north trail with his old gun and the bitch for protection.

The cavalry mount was slow but sure, provided the impossible was not required of him — too slow for Bob on his way to Kinni-kinnik's tepee of a cold afternoon in November. . .

It is warm in the wigwam, warm and cozy in the glow of the central fire through the smoke. Often he plays the game of "silence" with the children and their mother; there are presents for the one who keeps it longest unbroken. When all is quiet in the tepee, their mother sings about the fat pig hanging in a tree — a snicker — "Who's that?" Dead silence on the little ones' part. The mother continues her song of a Frenchman, of the man-with-a-pack and, last, of a rabbit — jumping, leaping. "Who will win this arrow?" She draws forth from its hiding-place a vermilion-tipped arrow; she had it beneath the blanket.

The children are still, like mice. It is so warm and drowsy in the wigwam. The mother sings again, ending her song suddenly with "*Zip!*" Pig, man-with-a-pack, Frenchman, rabbit — all have vanished into dreamland through the gateway of song.

It is dark outside in the woods. The wind is rising. Bob shivers at the sound; but the two baby brothers lie curled up with their puppies on the blanket, and Kinni-kinnik's winks are long and far between as she snuggles against her mother. . .

Out of the warmth and the hominess the boy goes homeward glad of a breath of fresh air in his lungs after the close, smelly atmosphere of the wigwam, but with a strange hunger in his heart. It is lonely in the woods on the north trail. The sun has set.

The horse is too slow going either north or south for Bob. All old Flying Loon's stories race through his mind.

It grows dark on the trail. The gray bark of the great sycamore, that stands at the meeting of the three trails, shows ghastly in the twilight. In the boy's greatening pupils, backed by his quickened imagination, it assumes the form of an Indian Chief — the old squaw's brother who in this very region wreaked fearful vengeance on the Sioux. A quivering misshapen aspen embodies the old squaw's mother, the great medicine-woman; he hears her whispered incantations in the rustle of its leaves. A burned and blackened poplar stump lying beside the trail is the crumpled body of a "black-robe" killed by the Sioux.

The *swish* — somewhere — of a lynx! He hears it. It raises the gooseflesh all over his body. The snapping of dried underbrush in the woodsy gloom gives a bad jolt to his heart. . .

Each time he swore never to go over the trail again after dark; and time and time again forswore himself, for the trail had for him always its own peculiar lure, and just to see the mothering of her babies by Jane's sister fed something of the boy's heart-hunger which he felt but could not define.

2

It remained for Flying Loon and her old nephew, the medicine-man, to complete his Indian education.

This ancient squaw — her skin was like singed hide, her body like a brown skeleton leaf in autumn — was a veritable treasure-house of Indian legendary lore and tradition. Her mother had been a famous medicine-woman in her day. Flying Loon, her century-old daughter, familiar with every legend, a conjurer of

spirits of animals, believing honestly in "spooks", peopling the wilderness with ghosts of old-time warrior bands returning from the warpath, filled so full the boy's receptive mind, so kindled his imagination, that the wilderness became alive for him; its trails spirit-filled with bands of warring Sioux and Cree; his ears quick to hear the almost noiseless tread of its by-gone generations. The remnants of its old altars and their mysteries were almost sacred to him.

Many an hour Bob spent in company with Carmastic and the old squaw. The saddle-maker was amused at this intimacy; it also aroused his interest and curiosity.

"Wot d'ye talk 'bout with 'em, Son?" he asked him once when the boy's home-coming had been later than usual.

"Oh, most anything."

"Injuns do most o' the talkin', or you?"

He wanted to draw the boy out and knew the only way was by the direct question.

"Kind o' half an' half." Bob smiled out of the corners of his brown eyes. He knew how to increase the saddle-maker's curiosity; he practised his methods on the Indians who are like children in this respect.

"Half an' half o' wot?" Plunket's patience was practically endless when he was on the trail of an interesting investigation.

"We swap yarns."

"Swap, do ye? Wot kind d' ye swap?"

"Injun and the Book yarns. Old Flyin' Loon tells reg'lar spook ones 'bout dreams, an' spirits walkin' down by the lakes. An' then I go her one better — you see, I have to, or she wouldn't respect me."

The saddle-maker smiled. He knew what "yarns" the boy's vivid imagination could bring forth on occasion.

"Yep. I tell her 'bout Saul's goin' to the Witch of Endor, and how she drew a great circle with her staff — I put that in; you see, the Injuns are great on circles; it's their magic — on the ground; an' she called up Samuel who was dead and had been a great medicine-man and Saul's best friend; and how the ghost of Samuel spoke to Saul an' said he would lose all his lands and his warriors and his sons because he hadn't done what the Great Spirit had ordered him to do — kill off another tribe. An' Saul was so scared that he fell down.

"It says, you know, Plunket" (Plunket did not know, but was an absorbed spectator of Bob's dramatic expression of Saul's condition), "that he fell down *all along the earth*, an' I showed her how he did it —" He broke off suddenly with a ringing laugh. Bill Plunket joined him; it was a tonic to hear that laugh.

"Gee, I got the old squaw scared bluer than Saul, you bet. She began to shake and try to sing, but her voice cracked so she had to give it up, and kept muttering something 'bout that was why the Crees had lost *their* lands, and warriors, and sons.

"An' I wouldn't get up off the ground, for I told her the ghost of Samuel had taken all my strength from me, just as he took Saul's, an' I'd have to eat something to give me strength, just as Saul did when he came to.

"You see, Plunket, I *knew* she'd got a lot of raspberries somewhere 'round, for Kinni-kinnik told me they'd been berrying — all day."

"Did she give ye some?"

"A heap! More'n I could eat. They always get something to eat when they come here; an' I wasn't goin' to tell my best stories out of the Book without gettin' good pay in feed."

The saddle-maker laughed. He knew what fun the boy had at times with his red friends. "How did Carmastic take it?"

"Oh, he — he's different. You see, sometimes he believes me an' then again he doesn't. Sometimes I yarn awful — make up a lot of stuff to fool him, but the old medicine-man knows every time. He just sits, an' smokes, an' says 'Huh — huh —,' an' he an' Chum laugh fit to split. But when I say, 'That's in the Book; I'll read it to you,' why, he always believes me."

"He tells ye yarns too?"

"Lots: 'bout all the tribes up north where McGillie is; an' way out west in the mountains; an' 'bout Indians at the reservation on the Missouri near our fort, an' all their wars, an' how they used to fight all over this mountain. He tells me how some of the Injuns trouble him; for, he says, Plunket, they have forsaken the ways of their fathers and taken up with the white man's religion. It's queer — but that's just what they did in the Book, only they put it in different words."

"Wot does the Book say 'bout that, Son?"

"That the nations had forgotten God and forsaken the ways of their fathers' God, and gone whoring with strange idols. Gee whiz! Didn't they get paid up for that, Plunket!"

"How, Son?"

"They got licked back into shape by God, Plunket. He didn't let one of 'em get away with their idols an'

strange ways. I'll read it to you to-night — it's awful; an' old Flyin' Loon's ghost yarns, an' all her massacres, an' scalpin's, ain't in it with what those nations that forgot God had to stand. You know, Plunket, sometimes I can't help thinkin' God kind o' flicked 'em on the raw — it was some punishin' He did."

"I guess they needed it all right. So Carmastic said his people had some of 'em forsaken the ways of their fathers, did he? Well, he's 'bout right; but then he ain't never had no truck with the missionary men. Once in ten years or so they come through here, but they don't make no headway — not with the Crees. These Injuns stick to their religion, an' I respect 'em for it."

"That's just what Carmastic told me. He said: 'Son of the Silent Places,' — you know he's called me that ever since he found me in the big timber by the lake with the three bays, over westward, away from the trail. I found a buffalo skull there an' I told him 'bout it. An' he told me the buffalo skull used to be on the altar when they had a ceremony, — he said: 'Son of the Silent Places, all men, red and white, are the children of the Great Spirit, the great Sky-father; but the red men worship the Sky-father in one way and the white men in another way. We do not ask the white men to worship our way, and we do not want the white men to try to make us worship their way. Red men and white men all have to eat to live, but the red man is not nourished by the white man's food, an' the Indian's food makes the white man turn pale. I have seen this. So the red man's spirit needs other food than the white man's spirit does.'"

"I guess he's 'bout right, Son."

"He sure is." Bob spoke as if his own knowledge were of this world and the next.

"Well, hold on to what the Book tells ye. It's a mighty old book an' I don't know much 'bout it except wot ye tell me an' read to me, but it's worth hearin' — an' my mother used to read it."

"I don't believe all it says."

"How's that?"

"Why, you see, you just *can't*, Plunket. There's that yarn 'bout Joshua standin' on a wall" (Bob embellished at times) " an' tellin' the sun to stand still — an' it did, an' its shadow went backwards! That's all rot, an' Carmastic says so too."

"Mgh. You an' the old medicine-man gettin' pretty intimate, ain't ye?"

"I like him; he explains things to me."

"Wot things?"

"Oh, things: how the animals talk, an' their spirits live always —"

"I'll bet you couldn't go him one better than that, Son. The old man was too much for you there —"

"I could too. I told him 'bout Balaam's ass talkin' to him on the road — an' he believed that, he did. But I don't."

"I don't know nothin' 'bout Balaam's ass, but my mule could most talk when she'd a mind to. S'posin' ye read me 'bout that talkin' ass *an'* the circumstances, then I'll judge for myself."

"All right. I'll read you, too, 'bout Elisha an' the bears that came out o' the woods an' ate up forty-two children just 'cause they hollered after him: 'Baldpate, Baldpate!' I scared Kinni-kinnik an' the boys so they didn't go out of the tepee till their father came home, tellin' them that."

"I wonder where that mule o' mine is," said the saddle-maker without noticing, apparently, Bob's last exploit in terrifying the three pappooses within their little red skins. "Kinni-kinnik's pa ever said anything 'bout seein' her?"

"Nope."

"Nor the horse — nor Jane, has he?"

"Nope."

This answer puzzled Plunket. It was time to learn something about Jane; it was high time to find out what she was doing and where she was. The time limit he had set himself for letting her alone was about to expire — three years and a half now since his home-coming to the squawless and childless hut. He had waited in vain for the Indians to put him on the trail. Of her whereabouts he had reasons for believing he could make a good guess; but no word or hint had his red friends let fall concerning her. He had hoped they would tell the boy something about her; that Bob would repeat this to him. This answer in the negative disappointed him. He knew the boy was truth itself when any serious matter was at stake.

He decided to take affairs into his own hands. Jane had been emancipated quite long enough and his two boys were outgrowing babyhood and needing a father — their father. Bill Plunket knew his duty, but anticipated little pleasure in doing it. He told himself if Jane had taken unto herself another mate, he would still be responsible for his boys and father them to manhood. If, on the contrary, she had remained his squaw — well, there was but one thing to do. Bob, noticing that his silence was not in the usual order of story-telling, left him alone.

During the next fifteen minutes the saddle-maker chewed the bitter cud common to all men who have made a matrimonial mistake.

McGillie

During his last year on the mountain, McGillie's progress in writing was so painfully slow, and his instructor so impatient, that the semi-weekly lesson became a burden and discipline for both boys. Bob persisted in it because it was a matter of honor to earn his gun "straight", as he confided to the saddle-maker who found plenty of amusement in watching the two boys' manœuvres to diminish the lesson-strain. Moreover, he determined to keep on with his instructions because it opened up a way for him to earn a pony.

McGillie had let it be known through Kinni-kinnik to the Indians, that in time he would be prepared to write letters in English for them and mail them at Boissevain — for proper compensation. This proposition met with favor from his red friends, for often they were sorely put to it to make their wants and complaints known to distant authorities.

In consequence of this somewhat premature as well as rash statement, he was called upon before he had been six months at the hateful task of making what he called fish hooks and lariat loops, to write a letter to a certain trader in the north.

McGillie was staggered, but there was no crying halves. He agreed to do it "with help." Then much against his grain he consulted Bob, but only because he was confronted by stern necessity in time limits.

"Wot'll I do?" he queried anxiously. "I told

'em I'd write that letter for 'em, an' now I can't do it more'n a chipmunk. Gosh, I'd better lose my gun than go back on wot I've said to the Injuns! Ye see, if ye do it just once they get set against ye for life. I thought ye'd help me, but ye don't know much Injun." His pale blue eyes beneath scant reddish eyebrows were full of real trouble. Bob made no answer. He was thinking hard.

"Look here, McGillie —" He spoke so abruptly after a few minutes' silence that McGillie came promptly to attention and bored his worried-looking eyes into his attorney's; "— you can talk Injun, an' I can't, not much — yet; an' you can understand all they say, an' I can only understand a part."

"That's so." McGillie answered perfunctorily. He made no attempt to follow a blind mental trial. He could only wonder what Bob was driving at.

"*An' I can write* —"

This forceful pronouncement was interrupted by a superlatively whole-hearted confirmation from the would-be scribe:

"Ye're the rip-snortin'est kind o' a writer, Bob."

"*An' you can't.*" This self-evident fact lost no weight from the tone in which it was uttered. Hearing it, McGillie's hopes waned.

"Nope." There was both disgust and discouragement audible in the monosyllable. Bob laughed.

"You old numskull, — that's what my uncle used to call me when I was thick, — don't you see *now?*"

Poor muddled McGillie could only parry feebly: "See wot?"

"Gee, I'd like to punch a hole through your head an' let in some daylight. Don't you see that if

you can talk Injun an' can't write it, an' I *can* write English an' *can't* talk Injun — much, that we can make a go of it together?"

"How?"

Now Bob had collated and abstracted certain words from the Book that were intended to express the very essence of expletive when occasion demanded, as at the present moment. Having once suffered from a boil on the back of his neck, and his no great amount of patience being tried to the utmost by the continuous irritation and inconvenience caused by the eruption, he had gathered a little comfort from the Book of Job. He drew near in spirit, as also in the torture of the flesh, to this patriarch, and found a real consolation in the fact that he was much less afflicted than this Biblical subject. He never went so far as as to follow Job and curse his Creator. His innate reverence forbade that ; but he fashioned a semi-curse, founded on his present affliction and the ancient sufferer's, that, in moments of crisis like the present, gave vent to his extreme irritation and impatience in three words. Hearing that last "How?" of McGillie's, his impatience with the lad's stupidity reached the explosive point.

"By Job's boils! Can't you see through a gun-barrel when you're cleaning it?"

In despair of imparting to the slow-working mind even a dim perception of what he was aiming at, — a good bargain as well as a way for McGillie to keep his word to the Indians, — he shook his fist dangerously near the quarter-breed's nose.

"It's as plain as the nose on your face — ain't it? — that if I can write English an' you can talk Injun, an' if the Injun tells you in Injun what he

wants you to write in English, an' you've got a tongue in your head to tell *me* in English what he says to *you* in Injun, an' if you tell the Injun, in Injun, that you tell me in English what he says to you in Injun, why — I can write English for the Injun, can't I? Now see?"

It took several minutes and twice repeating before McGillie found his way through the intricacies of this scheme. But when he did —!

Disillusioned

I

So the pact was made, the half-and-half profits agreed to, and in due time the pony earned.

McGillie, in the third year of Bob's life with the saddle-maker, was in the far north earning his livelihood as trapper for one of the Hudson's Bay Company's posts in the region of the Great Lakes of Manitoba. After he left the mountains, Bob accepted the full responsibilities of the position of tribal scribe, and reaped all the benefits accruing to his unique position of letter-writer for all the Indians within a radius of many miles.

Naturally he was cheated in his first pony trade. The Crees are notably honest when dealing in others' property, honest and trustworthy; but, like their white brothers, they display the greatest finesse in trickery when selling and bartering what is their own. Generally they get the better of the bargain. A horse trade, especially, which among both red men and white is proverbially an accepted game of shystering, permits the full display of some of the meanest characteristics of mankind — at least, Bob found it so.

For over a year now he had been writing letters

to the best of his ability — no small ability that, for the boy had for his only and continual reading the one Book: a portion of the Old Testament that was found together with a pack of soiled cards by the three who sought refuge in the Missouri dugout, and tossed into the kit by the soldiers whose orders were to take everything belonging to the rescued. He profited by the reading in more ways than one.

This soiled, coverless torso of Scripture had been to him a wellspring of pure English. It provided him with a simple yet expressive vocabulary, and regulated the flow of his ever-ready language, clarifying the vernacular of his white environment. Together with the fine simple expression of the Indian thought and mind in the Cree language, — not such a distant thought from that of the Israelites in their tongue of old, — it gave to him the use of a dual language. He changed at will from the vernacular of the hut to the English of King James' version of the Book, conscious only of the change in that he used it to suit circumstances. His constant intercourse with the Indians increased this gift of dual speech.

That the letters were satisfactorily written was evidenced to the Indians by the replies they received which were duly read to them by Bob. Indians believe what they can see, and seeing the result of their written communications they believed in the boy and loved him. They failed, however, to understand his white outlook; as a result, all friendships came near suffering shipwreck on the pony trade.

2

On his day of triumph, Bob rode his own pony over the north trail. As he neared the hut he let forth a war whoop that roused the bitch to fury and

spurted the pony, who never had known a warpath, over the grass to the hut. Plunket and the dogs came out to see.

"See my pony, my horse, Plunket!" he shouted. "He's all mine — I earned him. Look at my blanket!" He flung himself from the pony to display its bright colors in warp and woof. "They threw it in." The saddle-maker admired it.

"They done well by ye, Son. Ye deserve it. Ye've worked for it — hard too. 'T was a tough job ye tackled to learn McGillie letter-writin', an' a tougher to keep at it. He can manage a couple o' words on a post-card, but that's his limit. Let's look the beast over."

He examined the pony's teeth, punched his chest, felt his hocks, passed his hand down his cheek, which the pony resented in a rather ugly manner by throwing up his head viciously, and ran his palm along his backbone. Bob, thinking he knew it all, had been unwilling to ask advice, concerning this trade, of the saddle-maker who was wise enough not to offer any, thinking it best to let the boy have his experience early; but he strongly desired his approval of this purchase. During the examination of the little beast, he tried to read the saddle-maker's face, but failed.

"He's a good looking pony, but looks can be deceivin'. Don't ye get too hot under yer shirt collar, Son," he said quietly, "'cause I'm goin' to tell ye somp'in' no man nor boy wants to hear for —"

"Wot's that?" Bob's voice was sharp.

"This beast is spavined in both legs, so he can't limp — see? If he wanted to, he couldn't. An' he's chest-foundered so he ain't safe on the down side o'

an ant hill. An' his sight ain't *quite* wot it ought to be; ye see he didn't know whether I was goin' to be kind to him or wallop his cheek with a rope just now — kind o' blind in the off eye. But his will is good to do just 'bout the right thing at the right time so long as he ain't interfered with, just like some folks. I'll say that much for him, and that's all the good there is 'bout *him*. Ye might stick on him if he'd let ye, but then again ye mightn't, just accordin'. They've cheated ye."

The boy's raging passion at the fraud perpetrated on him, the burning sense of injustice, the hate so suddenly kindled by the undermining of his trust in men and animals, overcame him so suddenly that his cheeks showed white through the tan before a surge of blood turned his face scarlet; then his anger found vent.

"I'll kill that Injun, I'll kill him — kill him!" he shrieked, yet choking over his words. He struck out blindly with his fists. With a howl the bitch fled precipitately. The pony caught a blow on his weakened chest muscles, reared snorting, then raced for the woods. The dogs turned tail and made for the hut. The saddle-maker alone stood his ground, although the bright blanket swished over his head as the boy flung it as far from him as he could.

"Just let me get my gun — get at him," he panted, making a dash for the hut and his rifle. But at that moment the saddle-maker laid hands on him for the first and only time since he had been with him. He must not let things go too far with the boy — or the Indians.

"Come along with me," he said firmly; and with

much balking and kicking, — the boy was beside himself, — Bob was dragged into the shed, taken by his belt, dropped on a pile of dried grass, and the door bolted on him before he quite realized what had happened.

3

For a month the boy was moody and mostly silent, plotting revenge. No word of the saddle-maker's appeased him; no argument held any force of conviction for him. He had been cheated after giving good work, defrauded in not receiving for it a square compensation. In vain the saddle-maker told him that white men did the same. He did not believe him. He had his own ideals of the white man's civilization.

"'T was a crooked deal, Son, and nothing can make it square," the saddle-maker admitted; "but let me tell ye, ye'll run up against a good many like it an' it don't help nothing nor square nothing to be a sorehead through life."

"'T isn't right."

"No more it aint: but their ideas ain't ours, don't ye see? Ye've got to look at things the way they do 'fore ye cut loose from 'em — won't see 'em when they come hangin' round here like children waitin' to make up. Kinni-kinnik's pa tells me that she's off her reg'lar feed ever since ye stopped goin' there, most a month. When an Injun stops eatin', ye can depend on it there's trouble."

All this was as water spilt on the ground; it failed to change the boy's attitude towards his friends.

"'T isn't right, 't isn't fair," was all the answer forthcoming. The saddle-maker desisted and trusted to time, the all-healer.

4

The very next day Carmastic, on his pony, drew up at the door of the shed where the saddle-maker usually sat at work. The two men had always been most friendly and the Indian's welcome was a hearty one. Carmastic dismounted and left the pony to graze.

"I have come to see Little Owl. He no longer comes to see us. Our skies are always clouded now; we miss the sunshine. Where is Little Owl?"

The saddle-maker spoke Cree fairly understandingly. "He was here a minute ago. He left when he saw you coming, Carmastic. You know why the sun refuses to shine?"

"I know."

"I will find him."

When Bob saw who it was coming out of the woods from the north trail, he beat a quick retreat into the shed, scaled the ladder to the low loft and lay at this moment under the eaves with his eye to a long crack between the boards. He could hear every word, and see enough to satisfy him that Carmastic was in full dress: high, dark blue leggings, a beaded and embroidered shirt fringed along the length of the sleeves, a broad scarlet belt beaded in white, and around his neck, over the shirt, something like a breast-plate wrought skilfully in a solid design of blue, white, and amber beads. It was a wonderful thing, a thing of extreme beauty as the sun struck it and sent a reflection up into Bob's right eye.

In his hand he held his ceremonial peace pipe at which Bob had been permitted to look, but never to touch although his fingers ached to handle the long stem, the carved red bowl. He saw the Indian sit down on his heels before the door. He rested the

bowl of his pipe on the ground and held the stem in his right hand; it reached to the height of his forehead, and he was a long-backed man.

Bob knew enough of the red people's ways to understand that this was a ceremonial visit and must be treated as such. It meant business. He said to himself that he trusted the medicine-man; that it wasn't Carmastic's or Chum's fault that he had been cheated out of a good pony. He wanted one like Carmastic's, and he knew he deserved it.

So for a moment his thoughts ran on, but no longer turbidly obscuring what, at bottom, was of value in the friendship of the Indians. Suddenly, hearing Plunket's step on the ladder, he longed with a great longing to mingle again with his friends. He told Plunket about it afterwards, applying Scripture as he often did when moved deeply: "My bowels yearned towards Chum and Carmastic." Whereat the saddle-maker smiled, for he knew the boy's misery had root in his social isolation as well as the wretchedness common to humankind when it kicks too long and too vigorously, barking its own shins, against the pricks of human meannesses.

"I'm comin' down, Plunket," he announced when the saddle-maker's head appeared above the square opening in the floor of the loft.

"All right, Son. I'm goin' to the hut to get some feed an' 'baccy for Carmastic."

The Pipe of Peace

I

"How, Little Owl."

"How, Carmastic."

A long silence followed. Bob was not at his ease,

for he knew not what to expect next, what to say or do. But he had already learned certain ways of wisdom from his Indian environment, among them the way of silence: nothing to say, nothing to mend. He sat down in the shed doorway at a respectful distance from the medicine-man.

Slowly Carmastic passed his hand along the stem of his pipe. At last he broke silence:

"We will smoke the peace pipe together, Little Owl."

Bob was staggered at the statement. Never yet had he put a pipe, or the weed in any form, between his lips. He had given his promise to the saddle-maker to wait until he was fourteen. But he knew he could not refuse this invitation which in itself was an honor. No white man would dare to refuse, much less a white boy. Nor had he any desire to cross the old Indian; on the contrary he cherished an overweening ambition to smoke this special pipe, noted, as he had been told, among the members of the tribe far beyond the confines of the Turtle Mountain.

"We will smoke it together," he replied, knowing this to be the only safe answer. He saw the saddle-maker coming from the hut, tobacco bag in hand.

"I'm goin' to smoke the peace pipe with the medicine-man." There was an unmistakable note of triumph in his voice. Plunket smiled.

"That's just as it should be, Son. Here's yer 'baccy." He handed it to Bob who gave it to Carmastic.

The medicine-man had three small sticks in his hand. Bob watched him with growing curiosity. The Indian made a crotch of the sticks and placed a

cross-stick in it. Against this stick he propped the stem of his pipe; the bowl rested on the ground. He knelt before it on one knee, speaking earnestly:

"Little Owl came among us, we did not go to him. We welcomed him. We called him Little Friend. Ponder what I say:

"His red friends have been tricked many times by Little Owl's older brothers. The white men came to us carrying two faces — one when they sought a gift from us: our land, the corn that grows on it, our waters in which we fish, our forests in which we hunt; the other when they had been given what they covet from us. Our lands, waters, forests — all are now the white man's.

"They speak friendship before the gift, they betray friendship after the gift has been bestowed.

"Now they are fed. We go hungry. They dam our waters, and we lack for fish. They cut down our forests; they are warmed and clothed by what we lack. Their iron horses carry them up and down our lands; they are free to go and to come. We may not move of our own will, but only at the will of white men. We are no longer free. But the children of these white men are not hated by the Indians; their fathers' deeds are not theirs. Ponder what I say:

"There are two kinds of white men, good and bad. There are two kinds of red men, good and bad. Little Owl has been tricked once by a bad Indian; for friendship he received fraud. Little Owl's red brothers have been tricked times without number by the bad white men for more than a hundred years — Flying Loon knows. I have said."

In the silence that followed Bob did some hard thinking for a thirteen-year-old. The Indian took up

his pipe, filled it, lighted it and looked inquiringly at the saddle-maker who shook his head with an emphatic gesture.

"We have always been good friends, Carmastic. We have no need to smoke the peace pipe. This is between you and the boy."

The Indian grunted approval. He lifted the pipe from the crotch; raised it straight up towards the sun; held it so a moment, then, lowering it, put it to his lips and drew a few times till the weed was bright in the bowl. He passed it to Bob, who had seated himself on the other side of the crotch of sticks in order to get a better view of the famous pipe.

Bob took the pipe with a gravity becoming the occasion. He gave the saddle-maker one quick glance as if asking his entire approval of this reactionary proceeding. His friend nodded. The boy put his lips to the stem.

It is one thing to watch a man smoke his pipe, taking his ease and receiving comfort from the process, and quite another to make a first attempt to smoke one, especially when one is a boy, unused to both pipe and tobacco, and confronted by some two and a half feet of pipestem through which to draw up the smoke.

It was with difficulty Bill Plunket preserved his gravity throughout the ceremony. The Indian's face was impassive.

Bob's face muscles were working energetically; he was giving his undivided attention to suction. His cheeks were hollowed by the effort, his eyes bulging, his face red with the exertion. For several minutes there was no perceptible result. Suddenly there was an irruption of smoke that would have done credit to a small volcano. Bob had put forth his

utmost wind-effort and drawn smoke into his entire breathing apparatus — lungs, throat, mouth, nose. He choked, sputtered, gasped, opening his mouth wide to discharge the surplus. His eyes were bitten by the saddle-maker's strong tobacco till they stung and watered. Through the running rainbow hues of their watery rims he looked to see if his friends were laughing at him, but both Indian and white man were to all appearances intent upon their own grave thoughts, unmindful of any volcanic action in their midst.

Bob took courage, and having regained his breath pulled away bravely, choking a little at times, but on the whole managing to produce some smoke, and more each time than he could well manage; but he was game to the end. When he began to grow a little pale about the mouth, Carmastic reached for his pipe, saying:

"We have smoked the peace pipe together; now we may make gifts." Wherewith he took something from his shirt and held it up for Bob to see.

"Flying Loon sends it to Little Owl. Her mother was a great medicine-woman — my grandmother. This is her sacred shell. As we know that the sweet-grass is the breath of the Great Spirit, so we know that this shell *is* the Great Spirit. Guard it well. Ten ponies may not buy it." He laid it on the boy's palm.

It was an object wrought from a shell. It lay on Bob's hand like the round, shallow, cup-like corolla of a full-blown flower. Its highly polished surface on the upturned concave side was flawless; its tints a marvellous, one might dare say divine transfusion of the pink prairie rose and the rich white of flowering dogwood.

For the second time in his short life Bob found nothing to say. He was awed. He could only raise his eyes to Carmastic's and look his thanks.

2

The saddle-maker was ready with his hospitality and provided the Indian with what he called "a good feed." When they had eaten in peace, plenty, and silence, and the inner man, whether beneath red skin or white, was experiencing deep satisfaction, Carmastic proceeded to business.

3

"I knew there was a tail to his kite — an' a long one," Plunket told Bob afterwards. "Let an Injun alone for gettin' somp'in' out o' ye 'fore he leaves ye. I know 'em."

Carmastic stated the case to his friends.

It seems the Indians had seen white men in the mountain district along the border line between the United States and Canada. They had met with them also on the north trail that leads down among the lakes and sloughs toward Boissevain and the western slopes where, since the completion seven years before of the great iron road of traffic from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the consequent rise of Boissevain to a small business centre, here and there a white settler had begun to farm the rich wheat lands of the Souris. They found, also, that timber was being taken out without asking leave.

The Indians were troubled. They read the signs of the times. To them it was an invasion — the beginning of the end.

For centuries this mountain district had been to them not only a habitation but a refuge. Like some great Ark of the Covenant it rises from out the

treeless plateau-plains of Dakota on the American side, and out of the rolling prairies of the Souris on the Canadian. For centuries they had claimed it for their very own; generations had lived in it, worshipped in it, and fought to preserve their temple in the wilderness. Now that Dread Thing, Progress, was threatening to deprive the poor remnant of the Crees inhabiting it of their last refuge, of their altars and their homes.

No wonder the Indians were troubled in their souls.

Carmastic had come to ask his little white friend to write to a man of power in far distant Ottawa about this matter. Would he do it?

For a moment the boy hesitated. The pony fraud loomed large before him. But he told himself it was not Carmastic's fault; the medicine-man had smoked the famed peace pipe with him, Bob Collamore, a white man's son, and there was but one thing to do — as he had established himself in the medicine-man's good graces, he must continue to keep in them. He felt the sacred shell within his shirt. For all he knew it might really be something of the Great Spirit. He did not wish to offend Him, but it should not be "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," as in the Book — not this time!

"I will write all your words to the man at Ottawa and send them through the trader in Boissevain."

The boy brought paper and pencil. The old Indian dictated. It was short and to the point. When the boy had finished, Carmastic rose to go.

"I will fetch the pony for you, Carmastic."

"I have no pony with me," he answered. "I walk over the north trail." He started towards the woods.

"I say, Plunket, is the medicine-man loony?" Bob asked in utter amazement.

"No. He's got the levellest head from here to Riding Mountain. Don't you see what he's at?"

No, Bob did not see. And not seeing, and Plunket not enlightening him, — he was enjoying the boy's perplexity too much, — Bob dashed after the Indian who by this time was entering the woods.

"Carmastic, Carmastic, wait — I'll bring your pony over to-morrow. He has strayed only a little way." He overtook the man whose long, rapid, silent stride gave no hint of his seventy years. Then Carmastic halted for a moment. He looked down upon the eager face, and smiled.

"The pony is Little Owl's. It is Little Owl's pay for the letter that shall deliver me and my people from the curse of the white man's ways with our land."

He was off again at a tremendous pace. Bob stood watching him till he disappeared along the trail through the dense growth of aspen.

"Well, he did the square thing anyway," was all his comment to the saddle-maker on the pony transaction, when the latter was caught and safe in the shed. He recognized the shell as a gift, a peace offering; but the pony he considered merely a just payment for services rendered.

The Quest

I

For a day or two after this conversation the saddle-maker noticed that the boy had something on his mind. He had learned to recognize Bob's varied moods. In this present one he was taciturn without being sulky, unnecessarily irritable at times when

spoken to, and somewhat negligent of the usual daily work which the saddle-maker for the boy's benefit and training had exacted of him. Noting all this Bill Plunket knew that he had only to bide the boy's own time for freeing himself of some load that gave evidence of burdening his conscience.

On the third day Bob spoke out. He was lying on his back in the grass before the hut. His knees were flexed; his hands clasped beneath his head; his eyes fixed on the stars, brilliantly soft in their great clustered Milky Way.

"Is a lie a straight lie if you don't tell the whole truth 'bout things?"

Plunket worked his pipe like a blast furnace for a full minute before he spoke. He was sitting in the doorway of the hut.

"That depends, Son," he replied between puffs.

"Depends on what?"

"Whether the lie is a low-down crooked lie that's goin' to do damage to somebody, by misleadin' 'em on purpose so they'll get smashed up, or a lie that's straight enough to tell with a clean conscience which is the kind a feller tells when he wants to throw somebody, that's nosin' 'round into what ain't none of his business, off the scent."

Bob considered this definition for several minutes; then he spoke abruptly, his voice unusually loud from some intense inward excitement:

"You asked me t'other day, Plunket, if any of the Injuns had said anything to me 'bout the mule — an' Jane. I said 'No.'" He waited for the saddle-maker to speak some word of encouragement, but this was not forthcoming. The boy perceived that he must "go it alone" — a lesson his friend had been

inculcating for the past three years. He spoke again, but slowly, feeling his way:

"You see I didn't lie then. The Injuns never said a word to me 'bout Jane or the mule, but" — he hesitated — "I didn't tell you the truth just the same."

Plunket took his pipe from his mouth. "How's that?" The tone was uncompromising, and Bob prepared to plunge into the midst of things in particular; but first he took the precaution to make his dive according to rules.

"You said Injuns, didn't you?"

"I said just that — Injuns."

"An' you meant Kinni-kinnik's pa, an' ma, and the whole kit of 'em over in the north village, didn't you?"

"I sure did."

"An' you didn't count Kinni-kinnik as one of the Injuns when you said it, did you?"

"Can't say as I thought o' *her* — no, I didn't." Plunket admitted this with a fairly good grace, for he saw ahead to a turn in the three years' blind trail.

"Well, you see I *thought* you didn't mean her; so when I said 'No', I didn't reelly lie, but —" He stopped short.

The saddle-maker put his pipe again between his lips and began to puff vigorously, but in silence.

"Kinni-kinnik knows things the Injuns said, an' she told me."

"Did she tell ye not to tell?"

"Nope; I can tell you all right, only — I don't want to."

"Wot's up? Bad news?"

"Not bad exactly. It's 'bout you, Plunket — an' me. 'T'isn't true, an' it's rotten — an' I don't want

to tell." With eagerness he blurted out this bald statement as if wanting to convince the saddle-maker that it was best to let bad enough alone.

It was Plunket's turn to consider. What had the boy got hold of through the little Indian girl that he was loath to tell? He had been kind to Jane, too kind; she had taken unfair advantage of his kindness and his absence. What could it be that was rotten? He was puzzled. Evidently Bob was willing to tell, but ashamed to. In any case the boy needed encouragement.

"Ye'd better get it off your stomach, Son. Rotten stuff don't set well if it's been kept there too long. Out with it. Make a clean breast o' it. I can stand it if ye can."

Without any more preliminaries Bob stated the case.

"Kinni-kinnik heard her ma tellin' her pa that you are my father and I am your son, Plunket. *I* know better, an' told her so; an' what she said is a low-down crooked lie, just as you said, isn't it?"

The saddle-maker's sense of injustice flamed suddenly into the white heat of anger. His pipe fell from his lips in his effort for control. When he spoke his voice was husky, but quietly level.

"It's a black, tarnation lie, Son, that's wot *that* is." He drew a deep breath and mechanically put his foot on the spilled and blinking tobacco. "D'ye know whether Kinni-kinnik's ma got that from Jane?"

"No, she didn't. Kinni-kinnik told me her ma said an Injun from a reservation on the Missouri, a Sioux, came through here on his way up north, 'bout two months 'fore you came back, an' he stopped at

the hut here an' told Jane a man of his tribe had been to a fort in Dakota an' seen you an' a white boy, — that's me. An' that I was your son an' a white squaw's you was livin' with there, — he meant our post-washerwoman who was so good to us an' took care o' us when we was gettin' well; an' Jane told her sister."

"By gum!" This was all Plunket said. Anything more was at that moment beyond his powers of expression, for the flashlight of Bob's revelation suddenly illuminated Jane's predicament, interpreted her feelings towards him, and the whole meaning of her precipitous flight with most of his personal property.

"Bet ye Jane wouldn't stand for no such doin's." Plunket was thinking aloud rather than speaking to the boy.

"That's what Kinni-kinnik said her ma said. She said she did just right to take Tom an' Jerry an' her things, — she wasn't goin' to leave anything for a white squaw, she said, — an' go back to her father in Minnesota. You said you knew Long John."

"I guessed as much." The saddle-maker spoke with a certain shrewd satisfaction; then he muttered as if to himself, "Tough on the old girl, no mistake."

Hearing this, Bob felt encouraged to tell all he knew — make a clean breast of it, as the saddle-maker had suggested.

"There's something else, Plunket. Want to know?"

"All favors thankfully received, Son." Plunket smiled, wondering what more was to be revealed concerning his squaw.

There was no further hesitancy in Bob's speech;

on the contrary his natural eloquence, which had suffered a decided check in his attempt to worm himself satisfactorily out of his "lie", flowed freely as he warmed to his special pleading.

"You see, Plunket, Jane wasn't married to you —"

"Wasn't, eh?" Plunket spoke sharply, but Bob gave no heed to warning notes; he had a certain pleasurable duty to perform towards his well-loved friend.

"— Not reelly; they all know it — the Injuns. You see, if you wasn't a white man, they wouldn't think anything 'bout it. But they say white men *reelly* marry; an' Jane said — so Kinni-kinnik told me her ma told her pa — that she was as good as a white woman, an' was goin' to be treated like a white woman by a white man, or get out."

"Can't blame Jane for that, Son, seeing she's a woman, can ye?"

"She said that, Plunket, 'cause her feelings was hurt 'bout what that Sioux man said he heard 'bout you an' me. If I was you, I'd reelly marry her; then she'd feel all right, an' Tom an' Jerry would be reelly 'Plunkets.' See?"

The saddle-maker nodded gravely. "Yes, Son, I see; an' mebbe, — only mebbe, mind ye, — I'll marry her. Can't have Jane's feelings hurt much longer, eh? An' I guess it's 'bout time Tom an' Jerry got acquainted with their father."

Bob doubled himself with a spring and brought himself to his feet. It was dark, or nearly so, and he didn't mind patting Plunket on the shoulder, saying joyfully — such was his faith in this man:

"I knew you'd do it, Plunket. I told Kinni-kinnik you would just as soon as you knew 'bout her

feelings. Gee, Kinni-kinnik's ma hadn't no use for me for 'bout two years. I didn't know what ailed her. But she's all right now. When will you get married, Plunket?"

It was then that the night was made vocal with laughter. Bill Plunket laughed till he could laugh no longer. Bob had not heard him laugh like that since the night when McGillie inventoried the "things" Jane had taken with her when she left the saddle-maker's empty bed and long unreplenished board. . .

2

Then they discussed ways and means, for the saddle-maker's decision had been instant to seek out Jane and bring her back to the mountain and his hut.

"I'll tell ye wot we'll do, Son; we'll travel like white men — go by train for a piece 'long down to Bemidji after I sell off three or four saddles to the settlers on the Dakota side. They're beginning to come in fast now and take up farms there. I guess Carmastic wasn't far off the trail when he said they'd have all the Injun lands 'fore long."

"You mean ride *on* the cars?" The boy could scarcely believe his ears — to ride in the cars like white men, to see white men, to be with white men! All this sounded unreal. The saddle-maker smiled at the excitement visible in the boy's face, audible in his voice.

"Yep, after we've sold the saddles. We'll take the old horse an' the pony, an' the bitch, — couldn't leave her behind; she wouldn't eat 'thout ye, — an trail 'long with our blankets rolled up behind us till we hit the Red River at Grand Forks, an' then we'll ride on the train from there to Fosston, Son, an' ship the horse an' pony so we can get from there to

Bemidji; we'll sure need the animiles in Minnesota. I tell ye it's a great State. Ye can drive an ox-team most anywheres over it 'cept clear up north. It's a good time to go too. Injuns visit a lot 'bout this time. Kinni-kinnik and her ma and the boys must be there by now. She told me she was goin' to visit her father; they have mighty good times visitin' together, Injuns, when they have enough to eat an' it's good weather. They've been gone most three weeks, ain't they?"

"Yep. Kinni-kinnik told me they was goin' to stay till snow flies. She said they're goin' to gather a lot o' wild rice to bring home for the winter. When can we start?"

"Next week; but ye needn't lose any sleep 'cause we can't get out to-morrow."

3

It may happen once or twice in a man's life that an event, seemingly of the most commonplace order, suddenly opens up such a vista of possibilities, hopes, ambitions, so extends the horizon of his previous straitened environment, as to revolutionize in a manner his whole attitude towards life. Such an event, in the fourteenth year of this boy's life, was this change from the Turtle Mountain country to that of northern Minnesota.

At the time, the two great trunk lines, the one passing through southern Manitoba, the other through northern Dakota, defined the limits of the Turtle Mountain region on the north and south. Already branch lines from these railroads were being laid to open up the land for settlement and tap resources on the rolling prairies of the Souris to the north, and the Dakota plains to the south. To ride

down the northern mountain slopes through the lake region to Boissevain; to watch the snorting engine bring the incoming train; to see it pull out from the station and race away over the prairies till it was lost on the distant horizon — these had been thus far the great events in Bob's short life. But these were mere excursions; the mountain and the hut remained to him all he knew of home. He had never been beyond Boissevain since his entrance into his paradise. During the first two years the saddle-maker made two successive annual trading-trips; McGillie and Bob were then left to look after what stock there was and provide for themselves.

On the present trip, Plunket prepared to combine pleasure, business, and the quest for Jane.

4

Both man and boy enjoyed their overland journey to the Red River — the man because, being about to sell his white man's birthright in order to satisfy his honor, he knew that once again in the matrimonial yoke he might never enjoy another such; the boy, for the reason that the so-called quest for Jane resolved itself for him into a great adventure into the white man's world.

They took it leisurely during the last hot days in August, journeying down the gently rolling south-eastern slopes of the mountain country and through the lake region that centres about Minne-waukan in eastern Dakota. They experienced a few days of scorching sun, and as many burning breathless nights. Tempests, too, and dust storms obliged them at times to flee to cover. But there were many compensations. Here and there, as they drew near to the Valley of the Red River, they found the fringing shade of trees

along the banks of streams; here and there the boy saw one of the great wheat farms of those days, twenty thousand acres of ripened grain — a pale golden prairie sea undulating, beneath the pressure of the wind, wave upon wave to the deep, deep blue of the far horizon. The sound of it at night, when they camped on its border, he never forgot. It was like no other sound then or afterwards known to him.

Food in abundance they found at the scattered farmhouses. The saddle-maker was known to some of the men, and the saddles found ready purchasers. The hard-working women of the family were ever ready to welcome both man and boy, for they gave no trouble, slept in the manger or, preferably, rolled in their blankets of a cool night, in the lee of a giant hayrick, horse and pony hobbled, the bitch on guard.

The night sounds of the prairie were not those of the mountain; they were not only unlike, but far more mysterious to the boy because of the open vastness around, beneath, and above him. The sun set in unearthly skies of glorious color; the stars greatened, fairly palpitating luminous light in that marvellous atmosphere of the prairies. All about him the soft dark was sweet with the scent of dried herb or grass.

Once only they slept in a bed with sheets, a luxury almost forgotten by the boy. The woman of the house called him "Son." She begged him to remain with her and her husband, promising him much — even to her little dead son's portion of the land and its increase.

Thus it came about that, having absorbed the various impressions of the new, having anticipated for nearly three weeks the surprise of each new day and revelled in the wonder nights of the great out-of-

doors, the boy mounted the steps of the train at Grand Forks with never a thought of the mountain that had been to him his home — all that he knew of one — for the past three years.

But, after the crowning adventure of the railroad journey and the detraining at the station of Bemidji, there was left only a straight prosaic course to Long John's hut — and Jane.

The commonplace finding of the squaw, — she was boiling fish in a kettle over a fire outside the hut, and neither Tom nor Jerry was in evidence, — the reconciliation that followed at some hour unknown to Bob, her commonplace marriage with "bell, ring and book", proved to be for the boy an anti-climax to those first adventurous three weeks.

It was all "so slow", as he wrote McGillie when telling him of the marriage of Plunket and his squaw. He further stated that if it had not been for the pony and the bitch, and a little tepee all for himself with a private campfire; if he had not been left to roam the forest at will and accompany Long John northwards to help him gather the wild rice in some of the shallows among the headwaters of various streams and harvest it from a canoe, he could not have stood it.

Even Kinni-kinnik failed to entertain him.

The truth of the matter was that, having sat at the white man's table, the well-known Indian environment had no attraction for him in these autumn days. Consequently he was off along the logging roads, exploring logging camps that were being prepared for the winter, taking the girth of trees and learning their age by counting the rings in white pine, basswood, maple, or oak. He was busy fashioning with Long John's help

a small birch bark canoe for his very own; "nosin' 'bout", as Plunket called it — acquiring something new day by day, by reading a line or a page in Mother Nature's text-book of the forests, or by fishing in strange waters; to sum up: rounding off, in the new country of the North Star his boyhood's out-of-door education, to the forgetting often of Kinni-kinnik, the ignoring of her small brothers, who could speak but a word or two of English, the neglecting of Tom and Jerry, who were his little half-breed shadows whenever they could keep track of him.

The new had for the time supplanted the old, or, rather, the boy was outgrowing the Indian environment and seeking for something that should supply its place.

III

A FOREST INTERLUDE

III

A FOREST INTERLUDE

I

It is the last of October, snow month of the northern Indians. The sky, a dome of hard opaque gray, shuts out even the flicker of a gleam from the afternoon sun. Apparently there is no wind stirring, but from time to time a strange noise is audible: a sound as of shrinking surface-roots, crackling moss, contracting bark-fibres on millions of forest trees and, intermingled, those curious faint subtones heard over great areas of fresh surface-waters, in a country that has never been drained, when those waters are chilled almost to the freezing point.

In the north, in the south, in east and west, lie chains of lakes lustreless as smoke topaz under the neutral tinted sky; and not only chains but loops and whorls of them, encircling, interlacing the vast swamps of cedar and tamarack from which and into which many of them drain. A few, however, are set in rocky basins; these stretch away to the northeast and the Canadian border, and all about them are acres of massive boulders piled high on the burden-bearing earth which is sterile save for the Jack pine, the mule among forest trees, that finds sustenance where other vegetation fails.

In the northern central and northeastern counties of this land of Minnesota, there are great areas densely covered with black spruce, tamarack, balm of Gilead, and Jack pine; but south of them the country as a whole is forested with a comparatively young growth, for at times mighty fires have raged within it — mighty fires and the devastating hand of man. Here and there, however, are to be found large tracts of the "old forest" where reign the giant white and Norway pine. Their massed green denseness lends to this land a look of eternal youth.

2

Upon a trail through one of these heavily timbered belts a party of four are just entering. They have crossed the two miles of fairly open country between the lake, where the canoes have been left, and the forest, and are intent on reaching their goal ahead of the threatening snow. They enter the half twilight of the big woods in single file: Antoine, the guide, half Indian, half French-Canadian; behind him a young girl, her father following; and bringing up the rear Long John, a Chippewa, assistant guide and bearer of the outfit-pack that is to make for their comfort in whatever rude camp they may find shelter for the coming night.

"You are sure you saw smoke, Antoine?" The man spoke insistently; his voice was jerky from nervous tension.

"For sure," the half-breed replied without turning his head or slackening his pace. "Mebbe Hinjuns; I tink no. I tink camp. De logmans 'ave tol' mah las' time: dis time dey come w'en come de firs' snow. Heem come," he added emphatically.

He halted suddenly, listening. The three halted

with him; they, too, listened intently. Not a movment among the pinetops, yet there was audible a soft hissing rustle that grew sharper and gained in volume as the fine dry snow crystals permeated the vast stretch of woods, sifted through the foliage, and settled in the matting of dead needles, dry leaves, and heavy underbrush.

"'Heem come', sure enough, Tony," said the girl. Her voice was gay with the joy of youth and the stimulation of adventure. She threw back her head, turning her face squarely upward that it might catch the fine mist of snow coming so suddenly from a windless somewhere as to dim the country behind them, and falling through the pines with something of the sound and effect of gauze drop curtains.

Snow in the forest! The girl was enjoying a new experience and realizing that with it a new world was all about her. Her father, on the contrary, fidgetted as he listened.

"We mustn't get caught out in a blizzard in this God-forsaken place," he said shortly; "let's get on."

"Mgh." The monosyllable expressed the half-breed's amused pity for those he called his "city-mans." He spoke reassuringly:

"Trail, he good; I mak' heem *so*." He pulled his cap down over his eyes to indicate he could make it blindfolded; then took it off to blow from the top the delicate white covering, fine as hoar frost. "Pouf! He like dat, yo blissar'; yassire! An' now yo no mak' worree for not'ing, hein?"

They went forward again, walking for the most part in silence. Once a grouse drummed in the distance. The trail grew more difficult. Twice it crossed clearings of many acres in which dead timber, stumps

and slash impeded them, at times blocking their way.

At the edge of the forest, where the trail reëntered it, the girl stooped without stopping and from the bare ground beneath a spruce caught up a gray goose-quill. She stuck it into the band of her close-fitting cap; it gave to her head the challenging jauntiness of an Indian chief's Calumet-eagle feather.

"Look, Tony," she said, pointing to the quill, "we are following the gray goose."

The half-breed, who had turned, smiled. The feather was a good omen; none knew it better than he.

"Yas, she is nikh-ka, de gray goose. She mak' — wot you call hit? — look. Wan half-hour, an' we fin' camp." He spoke encouragingly, for he heard the heavy quickened breathing of his "city-man" and knew his city wind would not last longer than that.

"And you think you can smell smoke, too, Antoine?" His city-man panted rather than spoke, attempting a bit of raillery to warm his own thoroughly chilled ardor for prospecting.

"Why, Daddy dear, you're winded, no mistake," said the girl turning and looking at him somewhat anxiously.

Antoine's large inflated nostrils snuffed the air like a red deer's when at morning he breaks from covert.

"Yas, I smell smoke; *courage, mon frère.*"

"Courage, Daddy; it's our last lap." The girl's voice was still fresh and joyous; there was no hint of fatigue in it, for was not this world of a forest besnowed a new enchantment for her? Was not adventure with its alluring uncertainties, its charm of possibilities still before her in the unknown camp?

For two hours already they had followed the trail from the lake. It was still an hour to the sun's setting; but in the forest gloom, with the steady falling of the fine dry snow about them, it might well have set for them an hour before. There was no stopping here for rest or breathing spell. The half-breed and the Chippewa knew their land and its ways: the ways of its late and early snows, of which latter the present was a good sample, quickly come and more quickly gone; its summer rains and spring floods, its frost and heat, its winds and calms. They knew its portages, its trails, the intricate waterways of its ten thousand lakes, and now with the first sough of a rising wind through the forest the two exchanged a few monosyllables of understanding concerning the condition facing them; then they set a more rapid pace. They knew there was shelter of some kind not far ahead and possibly rest, but none on the trail.

The wind increasing momently in violence was against them for the last half-hour. The gloom was deepening. Suddenly the woods thinned, lightened, and opened on a small clearing; crossing it they found themselves before a low shed-like building covered with bark. It was protected on the north by what looked to be impenetrable forest. Warmth and shelter were surely here. From the two windows shone dim lamplight and the uncertain flashing of wood flame. Antoine stepped to one and looked in. A hound bayed suddenly. Without ceremony the half-breed opened the door and entered, the others following.

At one end of the room a lighted lantern, swung from a chain hooked over a rafter, flared in the

sudden draught. Across the other end was stretched a rope over which hung curtains of some bright colored calico, with improvised valences in the form of thick quilts and coarse blankets, gray and brown.

As she entered the girl saw all this in detail. She saw as well three dark-skinned men who rose from their makeshift seats on some packing boxes. She saw the improvised wall-closet, likewise fashioned from a box; also in the corner nearest the door some straw and on it a hound with her litter; and — did she see aright? — in the farther corner among more straw, a pony, small and wiry, nosing a bale of hay. Her father sat down exhausted on a pile of burlap near the door. The girl at once gave her whole thought to him.

"Oh, Daddy, you poor dear, I'll have some hot tea for you in less than ten winks; help me, John."

The Chippewa understood her. He opened the outfit bag. She thrust in her hand, took out a can of tea, a pudgy capacious teapot of enamelled ironware, a tin of bacon and a loaf of bread.

Antoine, meanwhile, was interrogating the three men in all the languages known to him: Canuck-French, half-breed French-English, Chippewa, Swedish fragments he had learned from lumbermen; he tried even the Indian sign language. The men lifted their eyebrows, shrugged their shoulders, and scratched their heads; one, a youth, grinned broadly.

"Tam fool," muttered the half-breed in exasperation, "why dey no speak not'ing."

The girl laughed aloud at his perplexity. With teapot in one hand, frying pan in the other, she turned to him.

"Now let me try, Tony; these things speak louder than words to any man, I don't care who he is."

She flourished pot and pan eloquently before the six beady eyes that were fixed upon her, and indicated by expressive pantomime that she would like to help herself to boiling water from a big iron kettle on the stove. As one man the three nodded assent, and were rewarded with a smile, a smile that generally obtained for her whatever she wanted from man, woman, or child. It was an unconscious expression of frank comradeship, of willingness to meet an individual a little more than half way just because he was a human; of a direct trust in men and animals and the big world of which they are the factors. Taking note of this smile, the men gesticulated assurance that they placed stove, water, duck-soup, which she sniffed appreciatively as it bubbled appetizingly in another kettle, tin dipper, boxes and entire room at her disposal.

Antoine sighed audible relief at this happy turn of affairs and busied himself with setting out the tin camp service on one of the packing boxes. Long John dried some of their snow-wet belongings behind the stove.

The girl tossed her cap to her father and began operations. In a few minutes the bacon was frizzling; together with the crisp aroma of toasting bread it stung the nostrils pleasantly. Soon the nose of the fat teapot was steaming delectably. Meanwhile the ever increasing south wind went roaring through the forest with the sounding rise and fall of heavy surf on a beach of shingle, and changed the fine dry snow crystals to wet clinging flakes that plastered the windows white.

The girl, having first heartened her father with a big tin cup of tea, beckoned cheerily as summons to the men to be seated on the boxes which were ranged across the end of the room nearest the hound's corner. She indicated to her hosts that they were expected to place their kettle of soup on a box and feast with them; but they hesitated to accept the invitation. The girl looked her surprise.

It was then that the youth giggled in a voice that beginning in the bass ended in a cracked falsetto. He glanced towards the curtains at the other end of the room. The girl's eyes followed his, for she was consumed with curiosity to know what might be behind the scenes. She saw a face looking out between them, a young girlish face, long and thin, with deep-set brilliant eyes, a wide smiling mouth, the reddest of red lips, and between them strong, white, even teeth. Just over it was visible the dark, deeply lined face of a woman who was peering out eagerly, intently, yet with a certain timidity as if not sure of the meaning of these strangers' presence. Seeing them, the girl exclaimed joyously:

"Oh, Daddy, if you'll believe me there's a real live girl here; just what I was wanting to make me feel downright comfy in this wilderness."

With that she ran with outstretched hands towards the two within the curtains, and drew them out into the room, while showing her joy in their presence so conclusively that they quite lost their shyness and seemed to enter gladly into the gala spirit of the girl's adventure.

The woman and girl brought wooden bowls and spoons and a curiously shaped loaf of gray bread from the improvised wall-closet beside the stove.

They set them forth on the box nearest the pony's corner and placed the steaming kettle of soup in the midst. Thereupon they all fell to.

Between mouthfuls they watched the stranger girl and her ways which were so unlike their own; for not only did she serve her father, and Antoine, and Long John, sitting on his heels near the hound, but the worn-eyed hound as well that came at her invitation to stand gravely beside her and devour tid-bits.

Her spirits were infectious. She sampled the soup at her hostess' invitation, pronouncing it perfect. Her jest and laughter hypnotized apparently the melancholy hound to the forgetting of her tiny puppies that were nosing the straw blindly and in vain. The pony whickered. The youth laughed aloud. The young daughter of the house broke into unintelligible but evidently impassioned speech which her mother cut short by a cuff on the ear.

Antoine's face wreathed itself in smiles at the sight of his city-man's condition of creature comfort. He began to figure on a possible increase in his commission.

After the meal was over he and the Indian made ready the blankets for the night. The women cleaned the bowls by dipping them in the kettle of boiling water, rinsing them, and emptying the contents outside the door. Afterwards they brought out their lace pillows, bobbins, and coarse linen, and by the light of a pine knot set to work industriously. The pony stood with drooping head, sleeping with one eye asquint for unseen happenings. Then, at last, Antoine passed round some good tobacco from his city-man's ample store, and the girl, dropping down beside her father, where he sat on a comfortable

improvised couch of blankets, burlap, and straw, leaned against him, speaking earnestly:

"Daddy, I've been just yearning for a real adventure all my life, and this is a truly one, isn't it?"

To which her father, smiling indulgently at her enthusiasm, made answer: "It looks as if it had been made to order for you, little girl. We're mighty lucky to strike just this place. Antoine says it's the beginning of a loggers' camp. By the size of the stove he thinks the woman is going to do the cooking for the men; but he's not sure. These are kindly enough souls, but generally they're a tough lot."

A heavy blast roared through the forest, shaking the stout rafters. She raised her head from his shoulder.

"Goodness, what a storm! But it makes it all the snugger here, doesn't it?" With a sigh of bliss she hunched up against his shoulder again.

"Antoine has been telling me that it won't last long. We're in luck again, for this wind will take the snow with it before morning —"

"Oh, dear!" The girl interrupted him dolefully. "I was counting on the glory of it all, Daddy — I mean the forest with its branches loaded down with snow, and perhaps sunshine on it. Antoine," she spoke abruptly as if challenging him, "do you mean to say we'll have no snow to-morrow on the trail back to the lake?"

Antoine took his pipe from his mouth.

"Yas; de nort' win' he mak' in two, t'ree hour, wan day like de winter. De sout' win', he come an' mak' de nex' day like de sommer wot forgot to leaf: sonshine, de sky *bleu*, *bleu* like de *oiseau bleu* — yo know heem? De lak' *bleu* like de sky. An' de nort'

win' he sleep soun' w'ile hees brodder, de sout' win', make much veesite on de nort' lan', two-t'ree week, mebbe. He mak' sommer *à la Saint Martin*, sommer *Indien*, hein? An' nikh-ka, de gray goose, she tink she mak, for sure, wan gran' meestak'. She mos' turn back on de sky trail — she."

He took the girl's cap from a peg in the wall and examined the feather carefully.

"Yas: de sout' win' he mak' dis yhear wan gran' veesite."

He replaced the cap and began to puff moderately with great contentment. Things were working out to his satisfaction, especially the weather. If only he could contrive to hire that pony over in the corner for the return trip to the lake! He was concerned about his city-man. He considered him too soft, his wind too short, to go over that trail again in the morning with the prospect of three hours in the canoes followed by a rough portage of a mile, a short canoe trip on a second lake, and a tramp over a poor corduroy logging road for two miles to a hamlet where he knew horse and wagon were obtainable to take them to the end of their trip with him: a railroad station nearest to Lake Bemidji. He smokes in silence, busy with his thought.

His city man, also, is thinking thoughts, varied and distracting to his peace of mind, on the subject of future investments in this northern county. He, too, smokes in silence, but without the repose of his guide's manner.

The Chippewa, still sitting on his heels near the door, is smoking stolidly, steadily; he, too, is thinking — what? No man may know that Indian mind.

The other three men, aliens of unknown nationality,

sat on a blanket in the pony's corner, smoking and whittling axe helves.

3

For a while the soft irregular click of the bobbins, the snapping of the wood in the stove, the faint crisp sputter of the pine knot, were the only sounds within the room; without, the obligato accompaniment of the south wind, which since the last furious onslaught had subsided noticeably, was droning steadily through the tree tops with a deep 'cello mellowness.

After a time the girl rose quickly, went over to the hound's corner, rubbed her head and pulled her ears. The dog slavered. She took up one by one the three sleeping puppies and cuddled each between her hands. She laid them back beside their mother; crossed to the pony's corner and patted him a bit, whereupon he roused himself sufficiently to nose her arm; then his head drooped again.

The girl was restless. The new wine of life was working within her. The call of the wind stirred her young blood to something more exciting than the somnolent smokiness. She went to the door and looked out, exclaiming at the sight:

"Oh, Daddy, if you'll believe it the sky is clearing: there are clouds everywhere and the moon is fairly wading through them."

She closed the door and sat down beside the girl who was minding the movements of the stranger better than her work. She watched the dexterous fingers manipulate the clicking bobbins.

"They're singing a little tune, Daddy; if only we could understand the words! We *must* find out who these people are." She spoke impatiently. The

girl beside her looked at her, smiling; she would so gladly have chatted with this stranger.

"Antoine," the girl turned to him suddenly, "play for us. Give us the *chansons* of the forest and the voyageurs' old songs. You know how I love them — do play."

And Antoine, nothing loath to please the girl in this manner as he had pleased her several times before of an evening in camp, laid aside his pipe, produced various parts of his beloved clarionet, fitted the mouthpiece, and gave them of his best.

At the first soft clear notes, the youth threw aside his knife and leaned forward, listening, intent. The others folded their arms and fixing their gleaming eyes on the player swayed gently back and forth, their movements rhythmic with the music.

As the last note of "The Adventurous Crow" died away like a faint caw in forest depths, the girl spoke:

"Give us the Scotch ones, now, Tony; first, 'The Bonnets of Bonnie Dundee.'"

Willingly the half-breed gave them the melodies he had learned from the Scotch wives of the traders on the Canada border; gave them the rousing "Bonnets", the merry lilt of "The Bluebells of Scotland", and last "Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon."

It was then the girl sang in a sweet, clear, but not over strong voice the words of that melody. The youth's eyes filled. The alien girl's face flushed a deep red. If only they could have spoken their appreciation!

When she finished the mother rose, beckoning to the two girls. They followed her in behind the curtains whence came in a moment small cries of delight,

soft purrs of satisfaction from the stranger girl, and merry laughter from all three. The quilt and blanket-valences disappeared with a jerk from the rope. Antoine spoke to his city-man:

"De modder, she mak' nest for de birds. I tink leettle Mees fin' now wot she seek all de time, two week, on de trail, her *aventure*, an' she —"

The girl rushed out from behind the curtains, a violin in her hand.

"Look, Daddy, look! A violin, of all things. It was in a huge chest that's full of the most fascinating embroidered clothes. I'm sure this is the boy's. Now we'll have some music that will tell us their nationality, or I miss my guess."

She handed the instrument to the youth who took it tenderly, caressingly. There was no need for speech; they knew by his manner that it was his.

"Play, play," she urged, accompanying her request with gestures appropriate for violin playing.

He rose; felt the bow with his thumb; drew it across the strings; then, throwing back his head, his eyes fixed on the rafters, he played with heart and soul, as well as fingers, the *Czardas*.

"Oh, Daddy," she breathed rather than spoke, "Hungarians — the *Czardas*." She listened enraptured to the wild enticing dance music of the alien fatherland.

"Hongrois — mgh," muttered Antoine; "I know w'y dey no speak not'ing."

Once the youth glanced towards the curtains and smiled, but the girl was too absorbed to follow his look.

Suddenly the music changed from adagio — another rhythm, another dance. At the first note, that was both a call and a challenge, the curtains were pushed

aside and the Hungarian girl sprang with impetuous bound into the middle of the room, poised for a moment on the tips of her toes as if ready for flight, then threw herself with fiery but graceful abandon into the dance.

She was beautiful. Dressed in Hungarian peasant's fête-day costume: full frieze skirt of dark blue, full white linen blouse embroidered richly in colors, heavily embroidered bodice, silver chains, silver earrings, she seemed another personality.

The girl sat beside her father, her hand resting on his knee. The wild passion of the music enraptured her senses; the rhythmic grace of the Hungarian entranced her spirit. Absorbed, her breathing short, the pupils of her eyes dilated, she watched every movement of the little dancer. At last, as if spent with the ecstasy of motion, the girl sank slowly, in rhythm with a long-drawn diminuendo minor cadence, upon one knee on the hard beaten earth, only to leap to her feet at the sudden staccato crash of the last chord drawn across the strings, whirl once, both feet off the ground, and drop breathless and smiling on the box beside her mother.

In the momentary silence that followed the hound began to whimper. The Chippewa rose and, opening the door softly, went out, closing it behind him.

"Bravo, bravo," Antoine murmured admiringly. This was something unexpectedly new even for him.

His city-man rose and with old school courtesy bowed low, first to the Hungarian girl then to her mother. But his daughter, springing to her feet, went straight to the young girl, took both her hands in hers, and spoke from her heart, impulsively, and so earnestly:

"Oh, I wish you could understand me! I wish you could know how beautiful I think you and your dancing are. I wish I could make you understand what a treat you have given me — just to see you dance like that, and to hear you play," she added turning to the youth. "Can't you understand how I feel about it?" She made her appeal to both.

For answer, the young Hungarian, still holding the stranger's hands, rose and, first looking up into her face, bent over and kissed them both. The youth stepped quickly forward and repeated the process.

The stranger girl, embarrassed by such unexpected demonstration drew away suddenly, withdrawing her hands. Smiling, and reddening to her temples, she turned to her father, protesting in one word:

"Father!"

"They have a way, these foreigners," he replied, amused at her manner of accepting their adoration; "we can learn many graces from the old world. The girl is trying to get something over to you by the looks."

The Hungarian was gesticulating with all her might. The youth was evidently exhorting Antoine in the same dumb show. Finally he touched the clarionet.

"Ah-r-r-r!" Antoine responded with enthusiastic satisfaction. "Yo wan' that leettle Mees dance, hein?"

Finding themselves understood the girl's tongue broke loose, and the youth's followed suit. A rush of consonants filled the room; they sputtered, hissed, fizzed, zigzagged, chassé́d, changed partners, combining in a most bewildering fashion. In the end their guest understood that she was expected to dance for them and Antoine to play the accompaniment.

"But, Daddy, after that dancing — how can I?"

"Do your best, daughter; you've had lessons enough."

"Then I'll give them the Highland Fling. I'll show them we Americans are not such slow coaches after all."

She entered at once into the spirit of her entertainment. She seized Antoine's woolen scarf, woven in many colors, fringed at the ends, and setting her cap with its gray goose feather firmly on her head, she retired to the curtain end of the room for her first charge.

"Ready, Tony."

The "Fling" was on. She spread her box-plaited skirt of tweed to its fullest extent, and if her red and black striped petticoat showed to advantage she did not mind in the least; she was dancing the Highland Fling for them with all the charm of her personality. Arms akimbo, she charged and retreated; she swung and twirled, the scarf whirling with her; in and out of it she seemed to pass as it turned with her, — over her head, around her shoulders, — all to the accompaniment of the clarionet's gay notes.

4

Before she had finished, the Chippewa entered, silently as he had gone out, and spoke a low word to Antoine who nodded understandingly.

The half-breed had increased the already rapid tempo, and the girl was responding still more gayly, yet a little breathlessly, when suddenly the hound, every hair bristling, rose up from the corner and gave forth a prolonged, terrified cry.

It was answered by a low wail just outside the door. Before Antoine and Long John could open it, a heavy

body fell against it. Antoine spoke to the half awed, half terrified faces about him:

"She no wolf — she dog wot lost herself, so Long Jean say, two, t'ree week. He tink she die soon. She no mak' more trobble. She can no more." He stepped to the door, the girl with him.

"Bring him in, Antoine, bring him in, the poor thing. Don't let him die out there in the snow; we're not afraid of him. Let me see." She pressed forward close behind him as he opened the door.

Before the threshold lay a dog, not so unlike a timber wolf, long, gaunt from starvation, exhausted by the loss of blood from a wound in the haunch evidently given her by some wild animal stronger than she. The Chippewa stooped to examine the poor creature. He spoke a few words to Antoine. They were about to remove the dog from the threshold, but both father and daughter protested.

"Don't do that, Antoine," said his city-man; "bring her in; even a dog has feelings. Perhaps we can do something."

"Bring her in to me, Antoine." The girl spoke sharply in a tone the half-breed had not heard before.

Antoine consulted with the Chippewa. The youth and the man barricaded the terrified hound in her corner; the mother and daughter protected the pony in his.

"Hit better we give de dog de — wot you call it? — *coup de grâce:* shoot her."

"No, no, you shall not shoot her. She isn't yours. Bring her in, I say."

"You'd better bring her in, Antoine," said the city-man.

The half-breed and the Indian spoke together again. Then Antoine translated:

"Long Jean, he say Leettle Owl come sure for fin' hees dog, an' it 'bout mak' for to die Leettle Owl w'en he sees hees *pauvre chienne* so seek."

The girl did not heed them, perhaps she did not even hear them. She was gathering up an armful of straw from the pony's corner. She dropped it near the stove; took her rubber coat from the open pack and spread it on the ground by the straw. She spoke to the men bringing in the dog.

"Put him there."

The men placed the animal on the straw. The girl sat down on the coat, drew a corner across her lap and laid the dog's head on it. She appealed to her father who was standing over her, carefully feeling the dog.

"Father, put a little spirits into some of that hot water — quick, there's no milk here."

He took out his flask and to humor her did as he was told.

"Antoine, give me one of those chips, a large one," — she pointed to a pile the men had left from their whittling, — "and get me a wooden spoon from that closet."

Antoine obeyed promptly. She beckoned to the Chippewa.

"Antoine, tell him to wedge her mouth."

Her bidding was done with alacrity. The aliens in the corners were an interested audience, but at this moment the girl was all unaware of them.

"Poor thing," she said pityingly, lifting the dog's head on her hand. She dipped a spoonful of the warm liquid from the tin cup her father held for her

and poured it into the dog's throat. The creature seemed past swallowing. Gently but firmly she manipulated the muscles; the liquid went down. She gave another dose in the same fashion. She handed her handkerchief to Antoine to wet with the hot water. She waved it back and forth to cool it a little, then laid it on the blood-caked wound.

"Oh, Daddy," she said in a low voice, "just see the poor mother." She pointed to the dark, hard, swollen dugs.

"Where are her little puppies? Would it do any good if we put the hound's babies to her?" Her father shook his head.

The girl's eyes filled with tears. She stroked the large fine head. A quiver ran through the dog's body, followed by a quick low sigh. Antoine spoke:

"She mak' her feenish, *la pauvre bête*."

The hound was whimpering in the corner.

The Chippewa went to the door, opened it, and stood there listening intently. He whispered to the half-breed.

"What is it now, Antoine?" The city-man spoke abruptly. The dog's death had gotten on his nerves, for at home he had three fine ones of his own and well he loved them.

"I tol' yo: Long Jean, he say Leettle Owl bin coming for fin' hees dog. Heem come," he said grimly.

The next moment they were aware of the fact, for they heard the rapid snow-deadened thud of hoofs in the clearing. A moment more and a pony was brought to so sudden a stop at the threshold that he sat squarely on his haunches. The Chippewa stepped out; spoke a word or two, and thereupon a boy rushed into the room, speaking to no one, noticing no one,

seeing nothing but his dog stretched out on the straw, her head still on the girl's lap.

He flung himself down beside her, laying his ear over the sharp ribs. He lifted her head ; looked at her eyes. A sudden shivering seized him; his teeth chattered. He rose to his feet.

The girl stroked the dog's head.

"Don't you touch her!" he said fiercely. "She's mine."

The last word was almost a suppressed shriek. The girl removed her hand. She could but respect the boyish misery that showed, oh, so plainly, in the thin, white, set face, the chattering teeth, the shivering little figure, lithe, straight as a pine sapling; strong too, for without another word he lifted the dog's body, laid it across his shoulders, holding it by fore and hind paws as a shepherd carries a lamb, and started for the door. Antoine confronted him.

"Where bin going, Leettle Owl?" He spoke very kindly to the lad.

"Back." The boy answered in no uncertain tone with a look at Antoine that convinced the half-breed that here there could be no interference; but his city-man protested.

"He mustn't go back till we have dried him off, warmed him up well — such a little chap, and alone too. He can't be more than eleven."

"He tough, Leettle Owl. He like de pine-tree root wot hol' on for sure to not'ing. And he see in de dark like de brown owl — he." He let the boy pass, opened the door for him, and followed him out.

The girl rose and went to the window; her father joined her. Hollowing her hands to her temples to shut off the light from the room, she looked out. The

moon was partly obscured, but by its light she saw the boy with Long John's help lay the body of the dog across the pony's shoulders; saw him fling himself on, and the three start across the clearing, the Chippewa following closely.

"Now why the deuce is that Indian sneaking off like that to-night?" said her father irritably. "We're tired and need to turn in early with what's before us to-morrow."

"Antoine will tell us; he's coming in."

"What's all this for?" he demanded of the half-breed as he entered.

"Long Jean, he go wit' Leettle Owl to Chippewa village, mebbe eight mile sout' from hyear. He hire pony for de *matin* — nex' day; I hire de pony in de corner — me, an' yo an' leettle Mees mak' de bad wet trail to de lak' so — pony-pack, hein?"

His city-man smiled. His irritation vanished like the night's snow before the south wind. He felt again as he had felt already many times during the month's trip — how wise he had been to have engaged two such guides even at ten dollars a day. It was worth something to have one's anticipated discomfort on the morrow discounted in this pleasant fashion.

"And I'm glad enough. Now let's turn in; I'm dead tired."

"I believe I am too," said the girl; then, with a sigh, "Do you know, Daddy, I'm so sorry for that boy."

"So am I. It was tough on him, no mistake; but don't you bother about it any more. Good-night and sleep soundly." He kissed her twice.

"Good-night, Daddy dear." Taking up her blanket absently, she followed the woman and girl in behind the curtains.

5

All night the south wind droned softly through the forest to the accompanying *drip, drip, drip* of melting snow. When the morning broke Antoine's words were fulfilled: the summer seemed to have forgotten to leave. There were soft blue skies and sunshine; and every feathery pine branch, every brown leaf, every twig among the underbrush, every cup of moss was bejewelled with the snow-water dew — sparkle, glitter, prismatic colors everywhere as the strong, level beams of the rising sun shone into the forest athwart the trail.

The occupants of the camp were early astir and, coffee and bread disposed of, busied themselves in various ways — all save the girl. She stood just outside the door using her eyes to good advantage. She was taking in all the details of the rude camp, bark covered, that looked a part of the forest behind it. There were no outbuildings to offend the eye, not yet. No trace of fire was to be seen, no blackened stumps, no dead and down timber except the huge pile of pine logs beside the camp.

All about the clearing was the forest. North, south, east, and west the trees reared their great crowns against the skyline, and beneath them the green glooms were shot through and through with the fresh glory of the morning light.

The girl's face kindled with some strange reflection of the light. She looked to the south where the trail from that direction emerged, and there, coming out of the woods, crossing the clearing, came the Chippewa on a pony. Before him sat a wee Indian maiden, round-faced, soft-eyed, sweet-lipped, two dark brown braids showing beneath a little crimson and white

blanket shawl which enveloped her head hoodwise and fell in soft folds to her small moccasinned feet that dangled against the pony's withers.

"Oh, Antoine," the girl called to the half-breed, "come out, do, and tell me who the little dear is that Long John is bringing back with him!"

Without waiting for an answer she reached up both hands, as the pony drew up at the door, to lift the child down. But the little maid drew back shyly against the Chippewa, looking up inquiringly into his face. The Indian spoke a few words to her. Without more ado than a squirrel may make in running down a tree trunk, the child slid down the Indian's leg to the ground and stood before the assembled camp: aliens, strangers, Antoine, hound, and pony — a little red bird alight in the clearing among the towering pines.

"Who is the darling? Antoine, do find out." The girl spoke almost impatiently.

"She Kinni-kinnik — Long Jean, hees gran'chile."

"And what is Long John going to do with her here? Why does he bring her so far?"

"Long Jean, he ver' proud of hees Kinni-kinnik; he like for mak' show wit her. He say Leettle Owl bin coming on his pony, an' Kinni-kinnik an Leettle Owl mak' veesite on de camp till dat de camp *garçon* he come back from de lak' wit de ponies — four hour, mebbe. Den Leettle Owl tak' de ponies and Kinni-kinnik back to Chippewa village."

"You've planned well, Antoine," said his city-man; "and now let's be off." The Indian helped him astride the pony. The girl stooped to kiss the grave little face upturned to hers. The child drew back.

"Give me a dollar for Kinni-kinnik too, Daddy," she begged; "you have been generous enough with the others."

Her father with an indulgent word handed her a silver dollar. She pressed it into the child's hand.

"I've crossed your palm with silver for luck, dear little Kinni-kinnik. You can't forget me now, even if you want to."

There was just a flicker of a smile on the demure little face. The child's fingers closed tightly over the silver.

The girl took her seat on the aliens' pony. She leaned to grasp the toil-hardened hands held up to her.

"Good-by, good-by till we meet again." She spoke joyously, waving her hand to them as the little procession crossed the clearing and entered upon the sunbarred floor of the forest trail. Once again the girl turned to wave her hand to the group about the door, and looking behind her saw the boy on his pony coming from the woods to the south. She waved her hand to him too.

"Good-by, Little Owl, good-by," she called back in her gay young voice.

There was no answering salute, no recognition that he had seen or heard her.

"He's a queer chap." She spoke to her father just ahead. "I believe he has been watching us all the time from the trail across the clearing. Why didn't he come and say good-by to us, I wonder?"

"Mgh." It was Antoine who replied. "He bin dere de 'hole time, scouting. I see heem; he tink I no see not'ing. He wot yo call shy, like de red deer, is Leettle Owl."

"I don't see anything for him to be shy about," said the girl, indifferently. In another moment she was oh'ing and ah'ing at the radiant beauty of the forest in the freshness of the Indian summer morning. She let the others go on ahead of her. She told her father she could be trusted to ride a bit alone without a cavalcade in close attendance. He let her have her way.

6

She rode on drawing deep breaths of the tonic air. She threw back her head to look up through the trees at the irregular patches of deepening blue showing through their interstices. Somewhere, afar in the forest, she heard a low bird-note; then a crow cawed loudly above her; his call was answered by another and still a third. A rabbit leaped across the trail and vanished in the undergrowth.

After a time she was aware of soft almost noiseless steps close behind her. She turned quickly and saw Little Owl trotting silently by the pony's haunches. She drew rein at once. The boy reached up and thrust into her bridle hand a shell, or what she took to be one at that moment.

"It's for you," he said in a low tense voice.

Before she could speak a word of thanks, her surprise being genuine, he was gone. She looked back — he was running swiftly, silently. Even as she looked he was out of sight; the forest closed about him.

She started on the pony again, looking at the shell or what seemed to be a part of one; she did not stop to examine. She smiled at her thought: this was such a pretty ending to her adventure! She would keep this gift to herself. It was for no other. She was

sure the boy had given it to her for the unavailing pity she had felt for his dog. It was clear that he had chosen this time for his gift when both she and he were unobserved.

"Poor laddie," she murmured.

She unbuttoned her jacket, thrust the shell into her blouse, and rode on into the forest depths.

IV

THE PATH OF LIFE

IV

THE PATH OF LIFE

The Man-Boy

I

After his return to the Mountain, the saddle-maker was aware of an indefinable change in the boy. Had he been learned he might have called the change psychological, and accounted for it by Bob's recent experience of another environment; but not being versed in book-science of any kind, he accepted the simple fact that Bob wasn't quite like himself and that growing boys, much like the animals, are subject to such change. Moreover, he knew the boy still sorrowed for his dog to whose puppies he was devoting himself, his time, and a nursing bottle, with good results; for the rest he was little in the hut during the day, and during the nights of that wonderful autumn aftermath of summer slept, rolled in his blanket, in the woods over by the south trail.

The fact was Bob wanted to live on his own basis; that is to say he wanted to free himself from the hut and Jane. The saddle-maker soon saw into his manœuvring.

"That life in the Minnesota big woods kind o' spoiled ye for my housekeepin', didn't it, Son?" He asked rather suddenly one day when the lad — he was growing tall since his return — had dropped some

broad hints as to how he would like to provide for himself like a man.

Bob looked up quickly, a little surprised that his thought should be so easily read; then looked as quickly away, fearful lest Plunket read all his thoughts.

"Well, you see it's this way, Plunket: that tepee just suited me clear down to the ground, as you say when you like something awfully well. It was *mine*, you know; an' when I dropped that tent-flap at night it was just like a little house of my own — cozy, you know."

"I don't blame ye." The saddle-maker spoke thoughtfully. He knew that Jane did not regard the boy with any particular favor; he doubted whether, being an Indian, she would ever lose her special grudge against him. He knew that, so far as possible, Bob had nothing to do with Jane. He saw that he liked Tom and Jerry well enough although their very evident worship of him, which showed itself in following him about and discovering his whereabouts if within the radius of a mile, both bored and irritated him.

"I'll set up a tepee for myself, if you'll say the word, Plunket. The hut is gettin' too full of us."

"I'll say the word all right, but it won't be 'bout lettin' ye winter in a tepee, Son, not yet." He spoke emphatically.

Bob kicked an old bucket-yoke, that happened to lie conveniently near his foot, and sent it spinning across a yard or two of grass. It helped him to hold his tongue. At no time did the boy relish the least restraint or bear it without irritation; and least of all was he willing to suffer bit or bridle when his

desires seemed to him wholly legitimate. His inner comment on the saddle-maker's statement, that sounded a note of finality, dooming all his hopes of a life away from the squaw, was forcible; but the bucket-yoke proved a good scapegoat and he did not want to hurt his friend. Bill Plunket read rebellion in the boy's act; but he was wise, wise in dealing with this specimen of the younger generation. Bob remaining silent and glum, he spoke again:

"It's 'bout as ye say, I ain't denyin' it — the hut's gettin' too full for us-all, an' I don't blame ye for wantin' a little place to hole up in. Ye can't use the shed, for that's full, too, now we've got Hannah an' my horse back, an' your pony, an' the cavalry plug, an' the Minnesota heifer, an' the dogs, an' a hen or two — Jane is set on winterin' a few. An' it's like to be fuller — that heifer is right on her job. So the shed won't work." For a few minutes he was silent, lost, to all appearance, in deep thought. Bob felt it unwise to interrupt him.

"I'll tell ye what, Son, we'll knock together a little lean-to on the south end of the shed. Hannah can do the haulin' with the stone-boat, an' I can manage a good chimney for ye, — plenty of stone an' clay 'round in the mountains, — an' we'll fix up a place for ye where ye'll enjoy yerself, an' I can't say that for any tepee in a hard winter. Ye can look out for the stock, an' be handy if a horse gets stalled or the heifer gives us a surprise party, — a heifer'll do that most any time, — an' kind o' take the care off o' me. The old man's got plenty to see to in the hut."

Bob looked at his friend admiringly and gratefully. The lean-to was a fine way out of his difficulty, and no feelings hurt.

"I say, Plunket, that's rippin'-bully. I never thought o' that. When can we begin?"

He was all eagerness to escape from the thraldom of Jane and the hut. He realized that the lean-to would give him only partial freedom, but when he was older — well, he knew what he would do when he was McGillie's age.

"Right now, Son. We can't afford to lose one hour o' this weather. We've got to think o' the clay an' its good dryin'. I'll get the spade, an' hitch up Hannah."

During the next ten days the man and boy enjoyed themselves to the top of their bent. The two were always most companionable, but in the intimacy of their work in the woods, felling small trees and getting out the logs, their appreciation of each other deepened, their friendship ripened in the mellowing atmosphere of those November days. . .

2

Just as winter set in, bringing almost at once the bitter weather of those weeks in the dugout on the far away Missouri, the log lean-to was finished; its chinks were filled, its floor laid with clay, its chimney built on good principles — it was tall enough to assure a fine draught, and shallow enough to throw all the heat into the small eight by ten interior. When the clay floor was smoothed, a bunk knocked up across the warm shed end, filled with sweet-smelling hay gathered around the sloughs, and the buffalo robe laid over it; when the kettle and a few pans, that Plunket had provided out of his own store, having purchased them long ago in Boissevain to replenish those with which Jane had departed, hung on nails driven into the logs; when his gun rack was on the

wall, a fire bright on the clay hearth, and the puppies were asleep on the gayly colored blanket, that was the fruit of his first pony trade — then it was that Bob Collamore, now just turned fourteen, slipped the long wooden bolt on the inside of his door; made his own tea in his own black tin teapot; fried his bacon in his own frying pan; stewed some dried raspberries in a very sweet syrup of his own concoction; and, after feasting like a young god, lighted his pipe.

There is no man on earth who might not have envied him. His joy in his freedom was great; his enjoyment of his little home entire; his satisfaction with all his circumstances supreme; his appetite — that kept him busy supplying himself. He was so happy in his special housekeeping, apart from Jane and her "jawin'" as McGillie put it! He didn't blame McGillie for clearing out; he would when he was older.

This conviction that to "clear out" was the only thing remaining for him when he should have attained McGillie's age — sixteen when he went north — grew stronger as winter wore to spring, for he knew that further complications in the hut were in order. He knew, because of his intimate knowledge of animal life, that this complicating event would fill the hut to overflowing in the not distant future. . .

3

"Plunket —"

The saddle-maker had come to know that something was weighing on Bob's mind when he spoke abruptly out of a silence of more than ten minutes. He waited for further developments.

The boy was hammering away industriously at a piece of brass — a bit of an old-time kettle which

the saddle-maker obtained from an Indian for almost its weight in tobacco. Bob liked this part of the work; it gave his fancy free rein. He made ornaments for the saddle, crude in their execution but artistic in conception. The boy was hammering something of bird life into the special bit on which he was at work — a loon on its heavy wing. The drawing was his; the hammered design showed creative power all of which was lost on the saddle-maker, but proved enticing to the whites and Indians. The saddle-maker knew only that the "high-falutin" brass, as he called it, increased the value of his good saddles. The difference in price obtained for the brass ornamented saddles and the unornamented went to Bob for wages.

As usual when working, they were seated in the wide shed door that opened on the woods to the west. It was cool there of a morning. After another five minutes of silence and busy work Bob spoke again in the same tone.

"Plunket —"

"Wot's up, Son?" The saddle-maker resumed the stitching of a leather strap.

"Chum said he wouldn't be round for the next four or five days."

"Why not?"

"Says he's going on a fast — on purpose, four or five days."

"Wot's he goin' hungry for? Never knew an Indian to go hungry for the love of an empty stomach."

"He says he's got to; it's the custom of his people." Bob easily fell into Indian ways of speech when speaking of them.

"He's right; they have an awful sight o' what he calls 'customs.'"

"What makes his people want to fast five days for?"

"You've got me there. I've lived with 'em half my life an' I can't keep run o' their customs — they're too much for me. Mebbe it's somp'in' to do with the Sun Ceremony they're goin' to hold here; one is 'bout due."

"What's that?"

"I can't give ye no right idea 'bout it — I ain't never been near it; but as near as I can make out it's somp'in' like one of the old-fashioned Methody camp-meetin's my mother used to go to when I was a kid."

"What's a camp-meetin'?"

The saddle-maker chuckled. "Ye're more like a woodchuck being smoked out o' his hole than anything else livin.'"

"Why?"

Bill Plunket laughed out loud. "Ye was sure born 'whyin', Son. Ye know when a woodchuck gets into his hole an' ye try to smoke him out, ye always have to stop up t'other entrance or 't ain't no good. An' if ye pour a pail or two o' water down one end, he's out at 't other if ye don't watch out. Don't ask me no more 'bout camp-meetin'. I was only a little chap, an' I was left to home."

"But, Plunket, I think he's got to do it all alone. He says that fourteen summers and winters have passed over his head and it's time for him to follow the trail of his fathers — fathers, mind you, not father. He said his grandfather made his fast when he was twelve, and after that he killed a white man because some other white men had killed his sister. An' he said Carmastic got his 'medicine' —

so he could kill that man — in a dream. Now what d'you make o' that? It sounds rotten."

"I dunno, Son, I dunno. An Injun can see signs, an' dream dreams, an' follow dead trails, an' swim bad coulées, an' see spirits walkin', an' have all the animiles talkin' to him like friends, an' — well, I can't just exactly say it as I want to, to make ye understand, but the whole o' 'em live two lives where we live one. I don't understand it, an' I ain't never tried to. All I know is they *do* see things we don't; ye can tell it by their goings-on. An' let me tell ye right now an' here: — keep away from their ceremonies, an' their dances, an' all their private gewgaws in the way of what ye might call religion; for I can tell ye it ain't healthy for a boy of white blood to mix much with 'em at such times. Stick to yer Bible."

"But the tribes in the Book did just the same things, Plunket!" Bob protested vigorously. "They did lots of things just like the Injuns, with their fasts, an' feasts, an' sacrifices, an' — an' — "

"An' wot?" The saddle-maker was curious to see how deeply the Indians' ways and traditions had been dyed into the white man's skin, at least.

"— An' their temple in the wilderness —" He hesitated, wondering if he should tell even Bill Plunket. "I've seen their old altars all 'round in the mountains."

"Ye have, have ye? Well, keep what ye've seen to yerself — an' me."

Bob, considering this caution, made up his mind to heed the first part of the advice and reject the second. There were some things even the saddle-maker did not understand.

"Anyway, Chum said he was goin' to-night — and into the mountain, too."

"Mgh."

"An' he said: 'To-night I leave my grandfather's tepee, and when I return I shall be a man.' Now how can he be a man over night? That's what I want to know. He looks just like a funny pappoose, an' he's only up to my shoulder." His tone was resentful. Chum the round-faced, who had not quite four feet six to his height-credit, Chum with his shock of hair falling over his eyes; Chum whom he had led into all sorts of boyish mischief — Chum asserting that he would be a man when he should have returned from a five days' fast and a dream with medicine!

Bob sneered. "He's crazy; clean plumb loco. I don't hold with such stuff."

Bill Plunket was a man of wisdom although not of learning. He knew that once such a trail of thought had been found by the lad of fourteen beside him, there would be no rest for Bob until he followed that thought to its lair. Knowing this, he spoke out of his wisdom.

"Son, if I was you, I'd go to headquarters to find out what I can't tell ye; go to old Carmastic. *He knows;* an' what he has a mind to tell ye, ye can depend on even if 't ain't much. He's been livin' on this earth now for more'n seventy years, an' he knows a thing or two 'bout it that we don't know. Only ye mind this: he knows it in the Injun way, not in our way, not the white man's — and you're white, never forget *that.*"

Bob hammered away hard at the brass before answering.

"I'll go this afternoon," was all he said.

He worked until near midday. After that he was missing. The saddle-maker smiled to himself, but was silent when Jane asked where Little Owl had gone.

4

That afternoon, Carmastic, having finished his midday pipe, lay down beneath a full leaved maple in the woods behind his tepee and went to sleep. When he awoke a westering sunbeam lay hot across his eyes, and something, either a crawling, creeping, or flying thing, was tickling his nose. In half sleep he brushed it aside, but what his hand struck was no living thing, no intrusive insect. He started broad awake; sat up alert. The thing was a piece of bark of the paper birch suspended from a string tied to a lower branch of the shadowing maple.

He studied the piece of white bark. There was a picture of a tree on it. He knew that tree: the great sycamore in the forest towards the lake. There were three lines converging at the roots of the tree. He read that easily: the three trails from west and south and north that crossed at that point. At the foot of the tree were a man and a boy. Beneath the pictograph, in the syllabic Cree symbols, a sentence:

"The Son of the Silent Places wants speech with Carmastic."

Then another pictograph of the sun in the west and the sign for immediate action. The old medicine-man smiled at the boy's cleverness. Not with all his Indian inheritance would Chum ever have hit upon such a device.

"He should have been of our race; his brain and thoughts are red, although his skin is white," muttered

the old man. He rose from his sitting posture with almost the spring of youth. Something in this boy brought back to him the days of his young strength. He would meet him at the sycamore; it was but three miles distant. He was curious to know the boy's need of him.

5

"Tell me all about it," the boy pleaded as the two sat together beneath the tree. He had made the old man aware of what Chum had said about his fasting, and declared he could not understand what he meant. "How do you do it?"

"You must fast till you dream."

"But what if I don't dream? I shall starve."

The old man smiled. "No, you will not starve, for the dreams always come with the fasting, after three, four, five days — none can say."

"I can fast five days, no more." Bob spoke decidedly. He knew what it was to be hungry, to keep an enforced fast. The memory of those weeks in the dugout was burned in as with acid.

"That is your test, your trial."

"And if I stand it, what then?"

"You must fast till you dream; and that dream, my son, is your 'medicine' — your part of that Life that never was born, because it always was, is, and will be. We Indians name it with a name: Manedo. I speak a mystery; you cannot know of it. You shall know of it only when life shall have taught you its meaning."

"But I don't understand."

"It is not given to such as you to understand — not for years. Wait, my son; wait, watch, listen. Listen to the loon calling over the lake; watch her

ways in the sky. Listen to the beaver gnawing through a tree trunk; learn her ways. Watch the lights in the Great North that run to and fro and no man knows whence they come or whither they go; you shall see signs. Watch the stars in their courses; trace the pathway of the spirits along that great white way that you may see in the heated nights of summer; learn to know the clouds."

"I saw the dancing fires in the North just before we heard the crows last spring. I know the way of the wind by the clouds passing, and I have seen spirits walking —"

The seer interrupted him. He knew only too well the stories conjured by the boy's imagination and he did not wish to indulge him, not just now. He continued speaking slowly and solemnly:

"Look daily upon the earth-mother that is heavy with what is about to be born — grass, corn, wheat, rice: things by which men live this life. Hearken to the soft goings of the forest creatures; learn all their ways; find out their nests and holes and lairs."

"I do that now."

"True, and by that token you may know you are on the right trail to acquire knowledge."

"But when does a boy have to begin to fast?"

"When he is about to become a man. Listen, Little Owl: you are old for your years, old and in many ways already wise. You know how the bird breaks forth from the egg; how the cub comes forth from its mother. After your fast you will know what it is to be a man, for then you will have set your feet firmly in the path of life, and your medicine will always be with you — a part of you."

"But what will the medicine be? How can I take it with me? I can not taste it, see it, handle it. You say it is a dream. Dreams are not real."

"My son, it is provided that at times men must do, without understanding what they do. At times words are dumb and only deeds have tongues."

"But Chum says I can't tell the dream to any one."

"True, you may not. Keep it to yourself. It is a part of you. Guard it in your heart. It is yours till you shall have gone forth on the warpath and fought as a man fights — to victory. Then you may sing it for all to hear, for you have won the right to sing it."

"Mgh!" The tone was sceptical. "But what can I do about it if I don't go to war? Wars have to be made; I have read that in my Book."

"Yes, you have read of wars and the mighty hosts of the tribes going forth to victory. I have respect for that Book; it tells, and tells truly, how men war. And you have read me a song, sung after war victory — a war song. I forget the woman's name, but she sang it even as the women of my father's time sang; as my mother, the medicine-woman, sang after my father's victory over the Sioux —"

"Oh, I know; you mean Deborah."

"You have said — a woman like unto my mother. If the white men would read and ponder your Book they could better understand their red brothers, for their fathers did even as our fathers have done. You have told me much, and what you have told me is true; I know it stands written in the Book."

"So if I can go to war, — and win, — you say I can sing a song about my dream?"

"You have said."

"But what do the men do that don't get the chance to go to war? Don't they ever tell their dream?"

"Not aloud, Little Owl, not aloud for man, or bird, or beast to hear; the medicine would leave them; they would lose a part of their life. — Have you ever seen a little banner, not a war banner, on a pole in front of hut or tepee? With a picture on it — it might be an animal, a bird, a fish?"

Bob nodded gravely. "I have seen such in the north, this side of Boissevain, the first time the saddle-maker took McGillie and me to see the train, and the engine that snorts like a horse."

"Tell me about it." Carmastic spoke guilelessly. He must know whether this were fiction or truth before giving more explanations.

"It was a pole just outside a little hut — an old piece of canvas in a frame; and on it was painted some kind of a bird. It could be most anything; I couldn't see head or tail to it. But it was a *bird*," he said emphatically.

"How do you know it was a bird?"

Bob smiled. "Because it had wings, plain enough to see. McGillie saw them too, and the saddle-maker said it was somebody's 'medicine.'"

"It is well; you have seen. The man who drew that picture of the bird had never followed the war-path; he could never sing his song that all might hear. But he made a picture of his dream, and he calls it the 'song-that-was-never-sung'; it is our custom. A man may not keep his dream, his medicine, forever hidden; it works him ill. It is for his health that he show the dream to those who pass on the trail; but it remains unsung unless he follow the warpath."

Bob sat on his heels before the old medicine-man pondering this matter of unsong songs, and dreams that were "medicine." Carmastic studied the boy's expressive face. He took his long pipe, filled it and smoked tranquilly. The boy paid no attention to him. Nor did he lift his eyes when a partridge, that was brooding her late chicks, so brown and speckled that they were scarcely to be discerned among the dried brown leaves of her make-shift nest in the underbrush just behind Bob, started up in sudden whir of terror at the smoke, and flopped away, as if broken-winged, in order to decoy the humans from her young.

So the minutes passed. It was a hot day. Across the lake the heated atmosphere quivered like smoke. The Indian and boy sat in the deep shade of the great sycamore. There was no breath of air, and the myriad insect life of midsummer was droning and shrilling its loudest. At last Bob spoke.

"Medicine-man, when are the Indians coming for their great Sun Ceremony?"

"Next month. Why, Little Owl?"

"Because I want to be free to see all I can. I will make my fast before that; then I am free to eat, and I shall not have to think: Now you must go hungry while the Indians are feasting."

"It is well, Little Owl. I will go now. Will you come?"

"No, I want to see the old hen come back to her nest; the chicks can't be a day old yet, or they would run away. They're nimble like mice on the second day." He took one of the tiny brown bird morsels in his hand and brooded it.

Carmastic smiled benevolently. "You are a son

of the earth, Little Owl. The Earth-mother knows her own." He turned into the woods.

6

Bob watched him out of sight. Then he pretended to play with the chicks, handling them very gently and not disturbing the queer nest that was a mere collection of leaves and grass. It looked to be a part of the ground. He wondered if the medicine-man were watching him; but he did not raise his head to see.

After a while he removed into the underbrush a few yards from the nest, and waited for the hen to return. But he waited in vain. The sun was lowering to the west behind the forest; the heated atmosphere cooled gradually and settled heavily upon the lake waters in violet mist. The red of the sun through the heat-haze glowed like hard maple coals seen through campfire ashes. Bob listened. There was no sound but the mad last-of-the-day humming, chirping, whirring of bee, cricket, grasshopper, and the fine buzzsawing of gnat and summer fly.

He looked at the sycamore. The coast was at last clear. He shinned up the trunk to the first fork and rested there for his next climb. Up and up he worked along among the boughs, choosing his way cautiously through this leafy upward trail. Carefully placing a foot here and there, as opportunity and a forking limb offered, he made his way towards the top — sixty feet, seventy feet; he was in the leafy crown. Then he sat down lightly and warily on the stout branch of a half bare limb, and looked about him.

The sycamore's crown was irregular. Evidently some forest tree had grown against it a hundred years ago and been levelled long, long after the giant

sycamore had attained its growth. The crowding pressure of this tree had left the leafy crown far from symmetrical, for branches had atrophied, or broken off, so leaving an open space free from much foliage. Through this clearing in the leafy forest of his treetop, Bob could look far away across the lake to the bluffs beyond — mere misty outlines now because of the heat-haze. Beneath him he could see spread out the grassy bluff and on two sides of it the forest. Out over the top of that forest he could look in two directions; each leaf therein was quiet, unmoved by any breeze. He wondered what it might be like up there in a high wind and chuckled gleefully, anticipating the sport of it when he should have made his nest.

7

Little Owl's flittings were many during the next three days. The saddle-maker was dimly aware of them all, but he played, through policy, the unobservant. One took place at high noon; two during the long twilight of the second day's migrations; the last one at night under a full moon. The dogs were shut up in the shed during these flights. The pony was requisitioned. Two broad boards weather-beaten to gray, a fifty foot coil of rope likewise weathered dark to partial invisibility — these things disappeared one by one from the shed.

Once Bill Plunket saw by the light of the full moon the unshodden pony, distorted into a pannier-carrying donkey by a bundle of hay across his back, loping over the grass; saw Little Owl throw his blanket across the hay, mount his pony with the evident intention of holding down the bundle, and disappear along the trail that led to the north.

That evening he was sitting as usual in the shed

door, smoking his before bedtime pipe, when the pony came trotting back, his proportions again normal. The boy was lying out along his back, head to tail. Bob put up the horse; then he sat down beside Plunket.

"Will you lend me your water-bottle, Plunket? McGillie took his away with him. I mean the one with the strap on it."

"Sure, Son. Goin' to the spring to-night?"

"Not to-night." He went to the big water-butt sunk in the ground just within the shed and filled the canteen.

The saddle-maker made no remark. He read the signs: the boy was making ready to begin his fast.

The dogs, loving the night-light in the full of the moon, had been nosing about in the woods to stir up what should chance to be there, and now by twos and threes came pacing leisurely homewards. At a low whistle from Bob they raced to him within the shed. He closed the door on them and bolted it. Thereupon followed sudden howls of protest; then quiet — at that moment every nose being glued to the crack along the threshold.

"Plunket, I'm going to make my fast now an' get through with it, and don't you give me away to 'em."

"Not goin' across the lake, hey?" The saddle-maker put that question in a tone that made Bob glad he had chosen another and more neighborly locality.

"No, not there — not near so far as that."

He slipped the water-bottle strap over his head; kicked off his moccasins and took them in his hand.

"Good-night, Plunket. Keep the dogs in for the night, an' — don't tell Jane."

"Just as you say, Son. Anything the old man can do, let him know."

"Sure I will." The tone was so hearty that the saddle-maker wondered if the boy were already regretting his decision not to be outdone by Chum; for he knew that emulation of the Indian boy was at the root of this venture.

Barefooted, the boy shuffled through the grass already wet with a heavy dew. Stepping into an old watering-trough he walked the length of it; then jumped out, doubled on his steps, and broke into a noiseless trot as he entered the north trail.

After the splash of the water under the boy's feet, the saddle-maker heard no further sound. He chuckled.

"He's put 'em off the scent; beats an Injun all holler, an' only five year at it."

8

It was a wonderful experience for the growing boy — those three nights that followed.

For the first half of that night he slept only fitfully. The environment was so unreal. The leaves also slept. There was no wind; but the forest was full of strange undaytime comings and goings, soft nestlings and flutterings. Very near the latter seemed to Bob, lying in his improvised nest so high above the ground. They were not earth noises either.

Once something brushed the top of his head. He threw up his hand quickly and struck a fluff of feathers; — a few seconds and the weird, trembling, crescendo circumflex note of the screech owl pierced his very eardrums. The unexpectedness, the nearness of the sound, humped the gooseflesh over his

whole body. He could feel his scalp rise. Then he pooh-poohed his own unnecessary fright and shook back into a feeling of comparative safety.

It was after midnight when he fell asleep, only to be wakened by the supreme effort of a timber wolf to serenade the moon. A perpendicular of seventy feet was decidedly reassuring to Bob during the hour in which the minstrel raised his voice. He couldn't help it — he began to consider the animals that climb trees, *easily*. . .

Nor bird, nor sun, nor drop of moisture dripping from the drinking leaves roused him before the sun was three hours high.

He made a careful descent then, but midway of his tree-trail, so he called it, stopped to reconnoitre his base. Peering down through the lower limbs he spied two Indians sprawled beneath the tree — stupid, dead to the world, overcome with liquor. He crawled upwards again to wait until they recovered.

How he longed to hook their blankets! How his fingers twitched in his desire to despoil them of the tawdry furbelows some trader had palmed off on them with the liquor. How he ached to stampede their ponies grazing so peaceably. He dared not — not now! In the afternoon, he saw them lurch across the grass to catch their ponies; watched them staggering towards the north trail.

During the day, which seemed to this boy of active limbs forty-eight hours long, a few squirrels, inquisitive as usual, watched him from neighboring branches. Their chatter amused him. He answered them in sounds that were not to be distinguished from their own tongue — so perfectly imitated in truth, that they drew nearer and nearer, captivated by the big

chattering presence of one not their own. But at the end of the first twenty-four hours Bob was distinctly bored; he was also hungry — and he had dreamed no dreams during the night.

The second night he slept the sleep of the blessed, although wearied with doing nothing and faint from fasting; but no dream visited him.

And that second day was like unto the first, only more so. Once he ventured down into the woods, drawn by the gnawing at the pit of his stomach. He knew where there was a fine black birch. He was mad to chew some of the bark from the tender twigs. Halfway he stopped short, clenched his hands, then, turning like a flash, ran for the sycamore, ran from temptation. He dared not break his fast. He was not going to be outdone by Chum; and Chum would keep his, for he was an Indian; the fast was his honor. He would show him that a white boy could do all an Indian could, and *this* was his honor.

He began to envy Chum, for by this time either he was through with his fasting, or he was dead. But if Chum had held out, and he believed he had (there was good stuff in Chum and he wasn't the son of a headman and grandson of a medicine-man for nothing), he vowed he would. This was the tenor of all his thoughts — this and the thought of his emptiness during all that day.

With set teeth and trembling stomach he laid himself carefully in his nest and prayed with all the fervor of the old prophets — much of this prayer vocabulary was borrowed from them — for a dream and daylight, that he might be free again. But he could not sleep; try as he might his eyes would not stay shut.

Heavy clouds coming up over the lake at sunset

obscured the moon. The close, hot atmosphere seemed to stifle him. Now and then a lightning flash gleamed on the lake waters. Low thunder broke afar in the mountains. Soon followed a sound that deafened Bob to all noises exterior to the periphery of his outer ear: the sudden patter of rain on the myriads of forest leaves — then the deluge.

He pulled his blanket about him, hid his head, and wondered why he was born to *this!*

The deluge ceased, the gentle patter of rain was renewed; little by little even that died away, and only the *drip, drip* of the moisture-laden foliage could be heard. The air was absolutely without motion. The boy was drenched to his skin.

Suddenly, without warning of any kind, he heard the oncoming roar of a mighty wind. Straight from the north it came, from Rupert's Land and the Arctic Circle. When it struck the forest the branches tossed and writhed furiously; the great limbs bowed and moaned beneath it; the trunks strained, squeaking, and boughs were wrenched from them; top-heavy old trees were uprooted. It was pitch black in this howling chaos of sound.

The boy clung in desperation to the two boards and the rope he kept knotted around a stout branch "in case." During the first lull in the passing of that mighty hurricane wind, which lasted less than half a minute, he tied the free end of the rope around him under his arms. It took time and manœuvring. This accomplished, he felt better. Then the wind arose again, but not in its might, and blew steadily, almost icily cold, until the boy was chilled through and through in the rain-soaked blanket, shirt, and leggings.

Now it was that Bob, in the best Scriptural text known to him, and in a vocabulary that admitted of no criticism in the way of forcefulness, cursed all Indians — cursed them by name, severally and tribally. Carmastic did not escape, neither Chum, nor all their relations to the third degree — Cree, Chippewa, Sioux, Blackfoot, Assiniboine, all came in for their share; for to him they were even as the tribes of Israel: they had forgotten God, and brought about this horrible state of affairs with their Baal-worship. He cursed all their tomfoolery, their fasts, their feasts, their customs, their fool 'medicine.' In the end he cursed himself for being fooled by them. He was wretchedly cold, miserably faint with fasting, and damnably mad. This last condition together with the energy of his language saved the night for him.

The moon came out. Scudding clouds filled the sky; so fast they sailed the motion made him dizzy. The stars began to shine out clear and sharp in the east. The shivering faster, with a last out-of-the-depths "Damn it all", hunched down into his blanket and, through sheer exhaustion, fell asleep.

9

It was a marvellous sunrise to which he awoke. There was still a strong breeze with almost a touch of frost in it. The lake waters were ruffled and heaving dark gray under the cold morning skies. The bluffs on the opposite shore of the lake were outlined sharply and black against the pure saffron red in the east. The sun, golden, yet without nimbus, climbed over them.

Bob watched it with greatening eyes. He noticed, at last, a tiny brown bird with white-tipped wings clinging to the rope. He did not know it. The great

wind must have brought it from its far home in the north. It was all ruffed and fluffed in its misery. The boy put out his hand and took the poor numb bit of forest flotsam on his palm, and opening his wet shirt warmed the bird against his heart.

He told of this once only, long years afterwards.

When warmed, chirping, and struggling, he let it go. Then he gathered up his own stiffened legs and setting them carefully on the boards rubbed them down. He lowered the boards through the branches. Then he spat on his hands, worked his way downwards, and, dropping to the ground, made his way home as best he could in the circumstances.

The saddle-maker watching from the woods along the south trail saw him start; saw that the strength had gone out of the boy and, seeing that, he, too, made for home by a crosscut through wet underbrush.

When Bob reached the shed he tumbled on the threshold. Bill Plunket, coming from the house, brought him only a bowl of steaming tea to break his fast, for caution was needed.

He was about to put a question to the boy after he had gulped this refreshment, but suddenly Bob lifted his head, looking at him gratefully. That one look into the lad's face restrained Bill Plunket for all time from asking any questions concerning his experience. What he saw there was a strangely mystical light that half veiled the boy's usually alert and animated features.

The saddle-maker knew that the boy had dreamed his dream; had found his "medicine." For a moment he felt awed in the presence of something it was not given him to understand.

From that day he treated him as a man.

Straining at the Leash

I

That the supreme change from adolescence to manhood was indeed taking place, if only in the boy's spirit, the saddle-maker knew within the next month. It sometimes happens that a quickly maturing mentality is the scout, not the vanguard, of the physical change. It was so in Bob's case.

The great Sun Ceremony was a thing of the past. What there was to see and hear — the gathering of a hundred or two Indians from the four points of the compass, the chants, the songs, the dances — Bob had observed from a lowly position, lying prone on his stomach and covered with dead leaves and green branches. He lay in the woods as near as possible to the tepees in order to hear and absorb what might be worth hearing and absorbing.

From his outlook in the sycamore he took a general survey of the whole situation — the horseshoe circle of tepees opening to the east and the lake; the temporary sacred tepee of the priests also open to the east; the building of the great lodge, the comings and goings of Indians in their beaded magnificence of sash, headband, or breastplate, in ornamented buckskin or gayly colored blankets. It satisfied his curiosity in part, but the performance was disappointing because he was of the white race and uninitiated.

He was talking about it with the saddle-maker after it was over. The Indians had already gone their several ways. The great lodge was left as usual for wind and weather to demolish. The grassy bluff had suffered a change: the grass was dried, worn and shiny. Here and there it was dug up by ponies'

impatient hoofs. Huge charred spots, where for eight days campfires had burned, disfigured it. The refuse of the many tepees lay about in all its disgusting ugliness. It sickened Bob.

"You know, Plunket, I can stand 'bout everything but their dirt."

The saddle-maker nodded sympathetic assent. He had not struggled for four years against Jane's speciality without gaining sad experience in that commodity.

"An' I wish sometimes —" He did not finish that sentence. Although the saddle-maker was sure he knew what the ending would have been, he did not wish to anticipate it.

"Wish wot?"

Bob's thoughts for a moment were painful.

"Plunket, you told me once never to forget I was white — a white man. I — I can't forget it, if I wanted to, and I don't — not with them."

"No more ye can't, Son; *I know.*"

Something in the tone made Bob lift his eyes to the saddle-maker's. What he saw there assured him that he would be understood without much need of further explanation.

"You see, I can ride, an' swim, an' shoot, an' trap, an' scout most as well as the Injun boys; an'," — with a chuckle, — "I can beat 'em singin' an' dancin' every time, all except that shake in their throats they keep up some of 'em for hours when they sing. It trembles just like the beginning of the screech owl's yell. But, you see, I can't be like 'em other ways."

"No more ye can't."

"And I don't want to be." There was no uncertainty in this statement.

"In course ye don't; 't ain't human nature."

"I want to be like my own — white."

"No man can blame ye for wantin' to be that, Son."

"Even McGillie isn't all white, is he?"

"Nope; only three-quarters — my two kids are half an' half," he added as a matter of fact.

"You see, I like 'em *all* — McGillie, an' Chum, an' Tom an' Jerry, an' Kinni-kinnik's brothers, an' — an' the medicine-man, an' all of 'em, Kinni-kinnik too."

The saddle-maker interrupted him. He wanted to feel the way of the wind that had set so strongly in the little pappoose's direction ever since Bob first saw her.

"Yep, ye set a sight by that little girl. I don't blame ye, she's a charmer; growin' up mighty fast too. An' she ain't had no eyes for any boy but Bob Collamore since ye give her that doll ye bought with yer first earnin's."

Bob smiled knowingly. "That's what McGillie got so mad with me 'bout. We fought for her." He chuckled; he was evidently enjoying the remembrance of his challenge to single combat.

"Ye fought for her! Well, that's news to me; but I know there was somp'in' between ye one while the way ye kept glowerin' at one 'nother."

"Yep; we made a kind of a treaty we wouldn't tell. It was to last two years. Time's up now."

"What was yer treaty, as ye call it? Any Injun doin's?"

"Kind o' that; we made ourselves blood-brothers —"

"Did, hey?"

"Yep. An' now I'd die for McGillie, an' he'd die for me."

The saddle-maker grunted disapproval. "It's 'bout time ye went to yer own people where ye won't be opening yer veins an' drawin' blood an' swappin' it for treaties. How did ye fight?"

"Fists. I challenged him." (The saddle-maker's eyes wrinkled prodigiously at the corners.) "That's the way they did it in the Book, you know. Two men from two tribes used to go outside the camp an' fight it out; an' the one who come out on top, his tribe was the best feller."

"Where did ye fight it out?"

"Off in the woods back of the north trail — you wasn't to home."

"Mgh. How did ye come out?"

Bob snickered at the vision conjured up by that question.

"'T was a draw."

"How's that?"

"Each of us knocked the other out, at the same time too. McGillie punched me one in my stomach, an' took the wind out of me, just as I landed him one on his nose — Gosh, but it bled! He got kind o' faint like, an' keeled over; an' we both lay out there an' couldn't get up — not for a little while." He burst out laughing.

"We both went over backwards an' we couldn't get up, an' the dogs —"

He laughed peal on peal at the remembrance.

"An' the dogs, his dogs an' my dogs, thinkin' we was dead an' had killed each other, set on to one 'nother with teeth and claws. They bit an' clawed an' chewed ears, an' noses, an' throats, an' buttocks —

it didn't matter what, so's they could get a hold. You could hear 'em two miles! We thought the Injuns would hear 'em. An' pretty soon we sat up an' began to laugh at the dogs an' st-boy 'em till McGillie said there wouldn't be a whole ear or tail left in the crowd. That's how the bitch lost the top of her left ear an' McGillie's black collie got his eye half dug out." He paused for breath, and to relive the scene.

"Then McGillie said we had got enough of it, an' he got up, reelin' round like a drunk Injun. I had to crawl, for I couldn't feel any bottom to my stomach — only queer in my backbone. We pulled together an' hauled the dogs off. An' then I offered to shake, an' we shook. The next day we made ourselves blood-brothers, an' — an' then — I told McGillie he might have Kinni-kinnik for all I cared. You see, McGillie *loved* her, Plunket."

The seriousness of this statement nearly upset the saddle-maker's gravity, but it behooved him, too, to treat this matter seriously.

"So that's the way of it? I thought it was t'other way to."

"Well, you see, 't was different with me. I did love her, but it wasn't for keeps, Plunket. Of course I loved her, or I wouldn't spent that money on her doll. I wanted to marry her too. *I reelly* did. I used to think it would be kind o' nice to be married, you know, an' — I — " He hesitated. The saddle-maker wondered what revelations of a boy's mind and heart might be forthcoming, but he said nothing.

"— You see, I didn't have anybody; I mean — well, you see when Kinni-kinnik's pa gets back home from trappin', her ma's so awful glad to see him. An' I thought 't would be kind o' nice to have Kinni-

kinnik glad to see me. An' that's why I wanted to marry her."

"Mm — Did you tell her so, Son?"

"No, not 'bout marryin'; besides, I got over wantin' to."

"Oh, ye did, did ye?"

"Yep." Bob's tongue sought his left cheek. He appeared to meditate on his statement.

"What made ye change yer mind so kind o' sudden?" The saddle-maker really wanted to get at the root of the incipient romance.

"Oh, things —"

"Wot things?"

"Oh, just things —" He bored his moccasinned toe into the dirt.

Bill Plunket knew the boy too well to press him further. He knew his way. He would chat freely by the hour about any matter that did not touch him deeply, but no Indian could guard with greater reserve the deeper feelings. It was baffling to the man, for he acknowledged to himself that for the five years the boy had been with him his plummet had failed to sound the depths in this young human's experience. And he but loved him the more for it.

"Well, Son, when you do make up yer mind to marry, mate with yer own kind — an' remember wot the old man tells ye."

"I'll remember — an', Plunket?"

"Wot now, Son?"

"I'm goin' away from here."

The saddle-maker knew now to what all this apparently desultory talk had been leading up. He said nothing in reply because, at that moment, he was not sure what he ought to say.

Bob looked up at him out of the corner of his eye. In his boy's way he dearly loved this man, but of the wrench he was giving him by this sudden announcement of his intention he could have no conception. No response to his proposition being forthcoming, the boy went on:

"I want to be with white men — an' live like a white man."

"I don't blame ye, Son. It's yer right; ye was born to it. Where ye goin'?" He turned the tables so suddenly on the boy that he caught him at a disadvantage.

"I don't know — not reelly."

"Trappin'?"

"Not for me."

"Loggin'?"

"Nope." He put Bill Plunket off the scent again by saying: "I wish you'd tell me all you know 'bout my folks. I want to know everything."

The saddle-maker had never been asked this question by the boy. He realized now that Bob had been biding his time to ask it. However, he was prepared to make known the little information he had gathered from Bob's uncle when the men were together in the dugout. It was with intention he had waited all these years for Bob to ask him what he knew.

"The 'everything' ain't much; I wish 't was more. Can ye remember yer mother?"

Bob shook his head. "No, I can't; but I remember her singing me that song 'bout the animals an' the ark, an' I think — I ain't sure though — I can feel her takin' me on her lap to tell me stories. I remember one story."

"Yer uncle told me she died when ye was six years old, three years 'fore we got caught in the dugout. He said yer father died just a year after ye was born, an' that he had taken up a claim in Dakota. He had bad luck — grasshoppers for three years, an' a prairie fire afterwards; lost everything, an' died in the fire. Yer mother crossed the plains, and went to keepin' house for yer uncle; he was foreman on a sheep ranch."

"I remember 'bout the sheep, an' helpin' herd 'em."

What the boy did not say was that, since then, whenever he had heard the flat trembling *baa-a-a* of a sheep or lamb, there had come over him a great wave of sickness. The sound recalled the herding, the continual *blatting*, monotonous, weird, incessant, of the hundreds and hundreds of range sheep. He hated the noise then. He loathed it now in remembrance.

"That's all he told me, an' that's all I know 'cept he said you an' he was the last of the fam'ly."

"Then I haven't got any folks?"

"Looks that way — not *reel* folks; but you've got me, Son, an' — "

The saddle-maker wanted to say something more; but he couldn't. The boy was dear to him, dearer, if he would but have acknowledged it to himself, than his own little half-breeds; dearer than Colin McGillie. He knew why: the boy was white, of his own race, his ways, his ambitions, his tastes, his dislikes — his own. The first thought of losing him out of his daily life was a heavy one; the second an immediate recognition that in the circumstances it was the only thing for the boy to do.

Bill Plunket longed at that moment, as he had

longed many a time since his marriage to the Indian woman, to be free to go and come, to slip the noose, when and where he might choose, of the permanent relationship into which he had entered through a white man's sense of honor. His next words, not completing his unfinished sentence, almost startled the boy in their intensity. He had never heard his friend speak so before.

"I thank God ye're goin', Son, 'fore it's too late."

This was the only expression the saddle-maker ever gave to his unhappiness, unsuspected by any one on account of his serene temper, his philosophic acceptance of what was, his kindliness of heart and his strict integrity — unguessed even by the boy beside him.

But, from that moment, Bob sensed something of his friend's unrevealed state of mind, and loved him the more for his misfortune.

"Where ye goin'? I know ye've got some kind o' notion which way yer trail leads."

Bob laughed. "South, Plunket, straight over the border."

"Might 'a' known it. I'd most forgot ye're an American, seein' I'm a loyal subject o' the Queen. That means Dakota, don't it?"

"I shall hit Dakota all right — sometime." Bob hated to be pinned down to any definite trailing. "But I don't know what I'm goin' to do — an' that's the bully part of the fun."

"Fun!" The saddle-maker's sense of humor was keen, but he could see no "fun" in the boy's sallying forth alone with no chart or compass save his boy's will.

"How ye goin' to live?" It was a sharp question, sharply put.

"Live? You mean feed?"

"I mean just that."

"Why, earn it, or pick it up as I go along."

This answer embodied the supreme assurance of youth. The saddle-maker bowed before the unwisdom of it; it was all-conquering. He could but think, however, of the experience ahead for this undisciplined stripling; by means of it life would modify all his expectations.

Then Bob began to quote Scripture, as he always did when the spirit moved to torment Plunket and put him in a tight place. Scripture was Bill's weak point.

"Mebbe, only mebbe, you know," the imp went on with a lift of his left eyebrow, "I'll be fed like Elijah by the ravens —"

"Mgh."

"— Or like the tribes in the wilderness with manna, Plunket, sweet as honey dew, *thoop, yum-yum.*" He tasted already the sweets of adventure.

"Humph! Ye won't find much 'manna', as ye call it, on the plains. Ye'll be in luck if ye find plenty o' dry bones, an' some buffalo chips if ye go far enough west. Ye layin' to go soon?"

"Yep — next week the moon fulls; it's a good time to start."

"Got any money by ye?"

"Yes, I've got some — 'bout ten dollars I have saved up. My boots cost me four, ye know. I have earned my pony, an' made my own saddle. I've got these;" — he spread his arms wide, — "an' these." He sparred in so lively a way with his straight legs, that Bill Plunket laughed at the show. "An' I've got a little in my pate, not as much as I'm

goin' to have, but it'll do at a pinch. An', you know, Plunket, I can live like a bird, a squirrel, or a bear —"

"Ye're all right, Son."

"A nest in a tree, a hollow in the trunk, a hole in the ground. I've learned the ways of foxes, an' beavers an' wild bees. Oh, you'll see, I can get my livin' all right!"

2

The saddle-maker rose. He placed both hands on the thin square shoulders. "Ye'll do it, Son, ye'll do it — only don't forget the old man. Let me hear from ye in foreign parts."

Bob Collamore looked into the saddle-maker's eyes; long and true the young dark eyes bored into the faded blue ones. He spoke in a low voice:

"'If I forget thee, O my Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.'"

Bill Plunket was satisfied, but he never knew that Bob had interpolated that "my."

Carmastic

1

Two days before Bob set out to see the world in his own way, the saddle-maker sprang a surprise on him.

They were sitting in the shed door in the cool of the evening. Jane, taking with her the children and the horse, had gone to visit with her sister for a day. She was given to migratory "spells" in which, according to Plunket, she was neither "to have nor to hold." He usually gave her free rein and enjoyed her absence — for a change.

"Jane an' me has made a trade, Son. I'm goin' to leave the mountains."

Bob looked at him with a dozen questions in his eyes, but he asked none. It was not his way when other people's business was concerned.

The saddle-maker nodded. "Yep; I'm goin' to pull up stakes and trek over into Minnesota."

"You mean leave the hut and the mountains for good?"

"For good and all. I'm only a squatter an' don't have to pay no ground rent to the Government, an' I ain't goin' to mix up with no settlers' rights an' titles. I'm goin' to get out o' 'ere 'fore the Government steps in; an' they're comin'. They've got their eye on the mountain for timber an' stock range. I used to keep a little myself; the shelter's good here on account o' the poplar and aspen bein' so thick — an' there's good hay round the sloughs. The Government knows a good thing when it sees it. Carmastic knows it all: the Injuns'll have to get out 'fore long — 'move on', same's they always have to, home or no home."

Bob was silent. The thought of such a change in the mountains was for a moment overwhelming.

"Ye see, it's this way." Plunket crossed his legs and hugged his knees. "Jane's got notions into her head, white notions too; got 'em while she was away, over in the North Star State. An' she's been at me ever since we come back to clear out o' 'ere an' set up like white folks across the Red River. She ain't give me much peace — an', Son, there's times when a certain kind of peace is worth buyin', even if it ain't cheap."

"What are you goin' to do over there?"

"I'm goin' to take up some land I see when you an' me was out there, forty acres at three dollars per.

There's some good pine on it an' plenty o' maple and basswood. I can keep a little stock, an' I've got my trade. Ye see, Jane says she wants the kids brought up like white men an' *eddicated.* She said that, Jane did." Bill rolled an eye appreciative of Jane's choice ambitions on the amazed youth beside him. Bob actually forgot to pull at his pipe in his astonishment at Jane's audacity.

"An' so we traded. I said she could have a house like a white woman, if she'd keep it like a white woman an' not like a squaw. She said she'd try — think o' that! — an' what more'n that can any of us-all do?"

Bob's experience in life provided no ground for discussion of this point. He kept silence.

"Ye can't blame her now, can ye, Son, for wantin' her boys to have a chance 'long with the whites?" He spoke wistfully as if craving approval.

Bob ran his fingers through his mat of fair hair, tanned and weathered now into a fine calico brown and yellow. He failed to grasp the fact that Tom and Jerry and the expected baby were to be educated.

"How's she goin' to do it?" he demanded brusquely.

"There's a school near there an' they can learn farmin'. An' now ye're goin', I kinder thought it would be a good time to break up an' get out before winter."

Bob said nothing. The saddle-maker left him "to chew on it" as he said to himself, and went into the hut.

For the first time since his decision the boy had a sharp pang of what might be called homesickness at the thought of the empty hut and no friend to welcome him when he should return; for he meant to

come back to the mountains, sometime in the dim future, at least to visit. What would the mountains be like without Plunket? No dogs, no ponies, no Indians, not even Jane and the boys? He failed to conceive of such a vacant spot in his young life. And Colin McGillie? Was he never to see his blood-brother again?

His pipe was cold. He went into the horse shed, threw the blanket over his pony, led him out, started him on the run and, running beside him, flung himself on, calling back to Plunket who appeared at the door of the hut in time to shout after him: "Where ye goin'?" —

"Goin' to see the Injuns. I shan't be back to-night." He dashed into the north trail.

"That shot o' mine hit the bull's-eye," said the saddle-maker with complacency; "knows now how it feels to be left all of a sudden like he's leavin' me. It'll learn him a lesson. He was full up; he can't fool *me*."

2

The pony's pace seemed to set the boy's blood aboil. He felt fevered, as if he were trying to flee from something of which he was afraid. Had he but known it, this was the turmoil of his emotions long suppressed, the heartsickness at leaving familiar things. In the cooling air and the mellowing light of the northern twilight he sped past the familiar stumps, the lightning-scarred poplars, the ghostly white of the birches. He knew them all intimately now, and their harmlessness.

He passed the Indian who carried his head under his blanket, the shaking squaw, the hooded priest, the ghosts of the warriors — all old friends, these

distorted tree-shapes of the forest before which he had trembled like a leaf five years ago. There was no more raising of gooseflesh now, no more heart-jolts.

Deep in the woods an owl was crying *too-whit, too-whoo*. The pony shied at a skunk loping across the trail. A coyote barked in the distance. It was all so dear to him, all the sights and forest sounds now that he was to leave them. He wanted desperately to cry. The bitch's son, Bully, that he had brought up through orphanhood, was following hard behind him. He whistled; the dog leaped beside him. The moon rose and shone brightly into the openings of the woods. Its light touched trunk and branch and leaf to a new beauty, for their summer freshness was fading.

He came out on the clearing, glorified now in the flood of white radiance. A path of fairy silver stretched away across the lake waters to a dim region of solid darkness. He knew it for the bluffs; above them rode the full moon.

Into the woods again, but more slowly, for the trail turned and twisted and the light was dim. Out again, and down into the little valley where his shadow, sharply defined, kept abreast of him. Up the hill at a walk, and over the top to the high plateau and the big maples beneath which a dull glow, as of embers seen through smoke, indicated the medicine-man's roomy wigwam.

The boy drew in his pony, and listened. From some tepees in the near distance came the sound of the drum accompanied by the monotonous rise and fall of chanting voices. A hound bayed at the moon.

Bob found himself shivering; his heart was full to overflowing.

He flung himself off his pony, and, leaving him to graze, with the dog to keep him from straying, entered the tepee with his usual salutation.

3

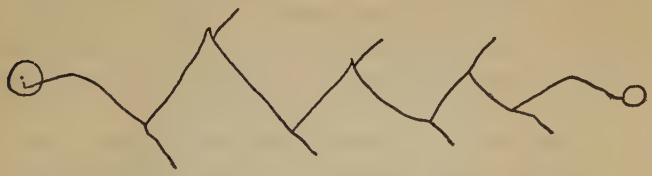
Carmastic was alone. Chum had gone with his father to the lakes, some miles northward, for maskinonge. Old Flying Loon was gossiping in a tepee half a mile distant.

The medicine-man was always glad to see the boy. He offered him his pipe and lighted another for himself. Bob, sitting on his heels, smoked in silence. Half an hour passed in visiting in this manner; then he told his old friend that he was leaving the mountains after the morrow. He told him of his wanting to see the world and what it held of interest; told him of many things, but never once did he mention that it was as a white man he would see, and hear, and learn white ways from seeing and hearing.

When he finished, the old Indian smoked in silence —for another half-hour. He rose then and drew from beneath a pile of rabbit skins an ancient arrow with an old-time head of flint. His moccasinned feet shuffled a clear space on the hard clay floor that was packed with dirt. He sat down before it. Bob wondered what next. As yet the Indian had spoken no word.

He began to draw with the incising point of the flint arrowhead, making a clear-cut line in the hard dirt above the clay. He drew carefully, as if calculating every smallest angle, every tangent, every curve in the curious design. Bob had never seen its like before. He watched the drawing grow beneath the steady hand guiding the flint. The process fascinated him. . .

When it was finished, it looked like nothing the lad had ever seen. It appeared to be a combination skeleton of some strange, reptile-beast. He dared not question the medicine-man; he knew too well the Indian way; but he used his eyes to good advantage, gazing so intently at the design, noting every angle, tangent, curve, that the figure was etched into his memory.



What did it signify?

4

The old man laid aside the arrow, but he did not resume his pipe. Presently he spoke.

"Son of the Silent Places, you and I have talked together not so long ago of dreams and their medicine. Since then you have fasted and dreamed, so you have told me. This is as it should be. Now you go forth to see this world, but not alone — you have your medicine with you; it is a part of you.

"I told you when we spoke together under the sycamore that, although you could not see it, taste it, handle it, it was a part of you. I spoke of it then as a mystery. It is not given to any man to speak otherwise of it. The breath of the spirit — that is a man's medicine: your medicine, my medicine, or any other man's medicine. It makes itself known and felt under various forms. All that I told you then sounded unreal in your young ears. You said as much. Now I show you what you call a reality."

He took up the arrow and began to trace the design, beginning at the left.

"This, my son, is the Path of Life, the path that every man born into this world must tread whether he will or does not will. He wills not to enter upon it; he wills not to leave it. He must both enter and leave it without his will. Here," — he pointed to the small circle at the left, — "he has his earth-beginning in his mother's womb. Here," — pointing to the circle at the right, — "he enters the great womb of the Earth-mother. Between these two wombs lies for all men the Path of Life.

"Look you — it is not straight. It rises, falls, curves, but it leads always from your human mother to your Earth-mother.

"It has its deflections — you see them — in every age; now here, now there. Here it is in youth. Here in the full power of manhood where the curve of the path reaches its highest. Here again in middle age. And once more in old age — a hard effort; you may see it here where the life-line runs low, curving down to the Earth-mother's womb.

"These lines of deflection are a man's trials of endurance: endurance of life's hardships — the freezing cold, the hunger that starves, the scorching heat that parches with thirst; endurance of the ills of life — sickness, crippled limbs, the scolding squaw who lets no man live in peace; endurance of the temptations of life — the wiles of women, the lure of fire-water, the greedy hand that clutches at dishonest gain. My son, you must tread this path of life. You must endure. I say to you twice, *endure*."

He laid down the arrow.

"Son of the Silent Places, I have shown you a

reality. Experience of life will prove to you that I have spoken truth."

He rose. The moccasinned feet shuffled back and forth again over the hard clay floor caked with dirt. Their slow even motion erased all trace of the Path of Life.

"So it is with our Path of Life. We leave no trace on the trail. It is only our medicine that lives on."

He lighted his pipe and smoked tranquilly, watching the youth's face.

For something had laid powerful hold on the spirit of that youth. To have saved his life Bob could not have said what it was. Like a spell the old man's words had first bound his spirit, then unloosed it. Dimly, while the medicine-man was speaking, he began to grasp something of the meaning of his own "medicine" that was an undying part of him, from which he could never separate himself. He felt suddenly comforted. He had his "medicine"; he was not going forth from the mountains alone.

He looked up into the old Indian's face and smiled. And upon the youth's face the medicine-man saw, as once before the saddle-maker had seen, a radiant mystical light that half veiled the smile.

It was the Indian's turn to gaze in wonderment, fascinated by that light. . . .

5

He was the first to break silence.

"It may be, as you fare forth into the world, you will camp on the trail of many of those I know — Cree, Chippewa, Assiniboine, Blackfoot, Stony Sioux. Greet them for me. Say to them I have smoked the peace pipe with them in spirit. Many of my brothers are on reservations, not free to come and go when

they will. Say to them from me, that if ever the time should come when men shall take the warpath once again to free their brothers or themselves, whether red, or black, or white, there will our children's children be found fighting side by side. I have said."

"It shall be as you say, Medicine-man." Bob rose and stood with bowed head before him. "I will take your greetings to all whom I may see on the world-trails." He offered his hand. Carmastic grasped it closely.

"It is the white man's custom; in time it may be ours."

Bob turned abruptly and left the tepee. The old Indian followed him to the doorway and stood looking after him as he rode slowly across the plateau.

The drum in a neighboring wigwam, perhaps a quarter of a mile distant, was throbbing steadily now with short strokes, so quick, so hard that the sound-waves struck the ear as quivering smoke-waves strike the eye. It was the war beat. The Indian's whole being responded. Suddenly on the night air there rang forth from the medicine-man's tepee the wild, exultant scalp-song of victory. The old man was renewing his strength by means of this resonant expression; reliving his turbulent youth, his conquests over the Sioux.

On the brow of the hill Robert Collamore stopped to listen. The old Indian no longer saw him. He was forgotten — he and his white race.

PART TWO

I

REVISITED

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1

"WHAT air!"

The woman, — for she was that although with all the characteristics of late girlhood: the figure slight, but graceful and rounded, straight as an arrow, color fresh, skin fair, — stepped from the train to the platform of the station at Bemidji in northern Minnesota. She drew a deep full breath.

"Air or no air, Alison, it's a wild goose chase you're on, and you will find I am right. Do change your mind this very minute before the train starts and go on with us, do." There was a note of vexation in Evelyn Carrolly's voice as she stood on the lower step of the car, her hand on the guard rail.

"Better heed Evelyn this time, Alie; she's apt to be right nine times out of ten. If there were any money in it, I would say 'try it', but you know well enough that account is a closed one. Come on with us."

The signal for starting was given. The man swung himself on, his wife removing to an upper step.

"Not this time, Phil; but let me know when you decide to go north and I will join you. Count on me."

"See that you do it," he shouted back to her, for the express was already moving rapidly. His wife, leaning over his shoulder, tossed her a hand-kiss; her husband waved his cap.

"I hate to have her leave us," she said.

They entered the car and, again seated, Mrs. Carrolly broke forth in a new spot.

"What do you suppose she is really up to? You needn't tell me, Phil, it is that land she is going to look up; there is something more to it, and in time you will see that I am right."

"As usual, my dear."

Philip Carrolly smiled. This wife of his was accustomed to vent her dissatisfaction with others, when they acted contrary to her desires, by assuming that her husband, simply because he was her husband, must inwardly controvert her statements. She paid no heed to his cordial assent; she was used to Phil.

"You needn't tell me there isn't a man in the case; I know better. You know perfectly well, Phil, how I have tried for years and years to make a match for her; but I don't believe wild horses could drag her into one. She has said as much. She is queer; for one thing she has never known how to accept the admiration and adoration of men. I'd like to shake her."

"Well, that could never be said of you, Evelyn." Her husband took solid satisfaction in paying back-handed compliments to his wife, for Evelyn Carrolly never knew there was an edge to any of them; and he loved to see her beam on him.

She laughed; drew out a stocking from a capacious bag, and began to work. Her husband knew that the knitting would soon restore her equanimity, and left her for the smoking car.

2

So this was Bemidji?

"Not the Bemidji I used to know," Alison Doane said to herself, as after leaving the station she walked down one of the business streets of the town, having been told that it led to the docks and boathouses. It was more than two decades since she had seen it, and Progress had marked the place for its own. In a few minutes she stood on the dock, looking out over the water. She would not have recognized the locality had she not been told it was Lake Bemidji.

Some men were loafing about the boats in the warm sun of late September. She interviewed several of them.

Could they tell her anything of Antoine Guilmette, a half-breed guide of twenty years ago?

Yes, one of them had heard of him; he was dead these three years.

"And Long John, a Chippewa, another guide?"

"Oh, yes; Long John was in Bemidji not a month ago on his way north; his daughter, Jane Plunket, was with him. Do you know her?"

"No, only Long John. Is he still guide?"

"If he can get a job. Injuns don't have much show with us nowadays. Can't I fill the bill?"

He was a young fellow, about twenty, lean, tanned, muscular, and the engaging smile with which the question was put displayed strong white teeth. Alison Doane, liking youth and being young in heart herself, then and there engaged him to take her, if possible by water, to a certain tract of land, — she gave him the details: section, range, township, — distant some forty miles from Bemidji.

"I know it; I was through there last spring."

"And does Long John live anywhere near there now? He used to."

"'Bout five miles north."

"And are there good places that you can recommend where I can stop at night?"

"Lord, yes; you can't go five miles 'round here without finding places you can put up at."

"I want to start to-morrow, if pleasant."

The young man showed a certain degree of hesitancy about agreeing to this.

"Well, Ma'am, the railroad has been run near a corner of that section now, an' I ain't going to close this deal without telling you so. You can take a train to within five miles of there, and a good team 'll carry you the rest of the way. You'll see all you want to, an' it will cost you less."

Alison Doane smiled. The youth's evident desire to do the right thing prepossessed her the more in his favor.

"I don't want to see a railroad or hear one, if I can help it, for the next month; so you must get me there as best you can without."

"All right, Ma'am, here's my shingle." He handed her a card with his name, and license number. She directed him to call for her few belongings at a certain hotel she had noted on her way to the dock, and telling him she would be at the boathouse promptly at eight she went back to the station.

3

From its fixed seat in the heavens the North Star looked down upon a giant river of the western world. Its right arm lay outstretched along the plains. Its forearm smote and cleft the Great Plateau. Its fingers clutched the bare ribs of the Great Divide.

Its left arm reached into the North, and within the vast curve of its elbow it held more than a thousand lakes. Its fingers sought the myriad rootlets of the Big Woods and nourished them for the salvation of generations.

4

For two hundred, three hundred, yes, four hundred years, the elements of earth, air, water, and sunshine were undergoing in Mother Nature's vast alembic various chemical changes to produce the Big Woods of the North Star State.

How slowly, how patiently she wrought — that Great Mother! With what age-long thrift she deepened and enriched the soil for seedling pine and oak, for birch and balsam, spruce and ash. Nothing was too small for her to utilize: a drop of freezing water, a tiny lichen, earthworm, fallen leaf, bone of bird, of beast, of man — nothing so insignificant she might disregard its instrumentality.

With what cunning she stored her still waters in swamp and shallow, pond and lake. With what artisanship she grooved the channels for her running waters — thread and trickle and streamlet, rill, rivulet, and river.

How her centuries of sunshine drew the stem of the seedling-pine ever upward, the while its roots bored ever deeper, seeking the provident under-surface water!

The Great Mother patiently bided her time. Thirty years; the seedling's stem is six inches through.

Fifty years; the young tree measures three feet in circumference. A man, loving it, may encircle it with his arms.

One hundred years. The stately shaft reaches

eighty feet into the blue, and is two feet in diameter at the height of a man's breast. It has seen the passing of three generations of mankind.

Four hundred years. The noble bole is six feet through at the butt. Its magnificent crown tops the northern forests.

Four hundred years in the making! How patiently the Great Mother has bided her time. In a day the hand of man lays low the glory of her workmanship.

5

Some such thoughts were Alison Doane's when, after two days of canoe and portage, she stood on what was once land owned in her father's name. By right it should have been hers at this moment.

She looked about her, recalling the density of the woods in this region twenty years ago. The land was denuded of its forest trees: its valuable white pine, its oak and maple, even its basswood. Some rotting stumpage was left; cattle were grazing among it. At no great distance the strands of a wire fence glistened in the low sunshine.

She crossed the shallow bed of a stream, gone dry since the protecting forest had been levelled. Far away across the stretch of three hundred and twenty acres, some men were at work with a large traction plough, breaking the good soil in the autumn weather. A road ran the length of the southern boundary, and in the distance, against a background of trees, stood a settler's small frame house.

The woman, eye witness to this march of progress, experienced a sudden homesickness for those great pine woods with which she once made acquaintance in her girlhood, for the green glooms of their trails white-flecked by sunshine falling through the branches,

for the love and protection of her father during those care-free days on lake and portage with him and Antoine and Long John. She turned suddenly to her guide.

"You say Long John lives only five miles from here?"

"Yes, to the north."

"And who lives there?" She pointed to the end of the newly made road.

"That's Bill Plunket's."

"Who is he?"

"He married Long John's youngest girl. Jane, they call her, — Jane Plunket."

"She is the one you said had gone with her father?"

"Yes, she goes off two or three times a year visiting up Red Lake way. She's got a lot of relations on the reservation there. Plunket's is a good place to put up at, for one night anyway; everybody likes the old man. I'd planned to stop there."

"But his wife isn't at home, you say."

The young fellow grinned. "Jane don't run the house much — it's her girl does it. You see, Jane's a squaw, and won't never be anything but Injun; but her girl is as white as you, Ma'am, and a right smart one I can tell you."

"What's her name?"

"Stella — Stella Plunket."

"And her father is an old man?"

"Yes, 'bout seventy."

"And Stella, how old is she?"

"Stella, let me see," — Alison Doane noted how his voice lingered slightly on the musical name and made a few private thoughts to her own satisfaction, for like a true woman she loved a romance however

humble, — "Stella must be 'bout twenty now. She's book-learned, Stella is." His tone was one of intense admiration.

Alison Doane felt suddenly less lonely, younger; she forgot for the time the pine forests in her desire for human companionship.

"Let's go there, then; it's getting late. We'll take the road."

It was rough walking and farther than it looked to be. The house was not inviting, seen from without. The low weathered barn looked the more comfortable of the two. The woman, recalling that night in the bark-covered hut among the pines, her first real adventure, smiled at the contrast this little frame house, high-shouldered, unfinished, dreary looking, its painted clapboards scaling, its blindless windows uncurtained, presented to that other with its alien occupants. She had never forgotten the youth's music and the girl's dancing.

As she neared the house she heard the sound of a phonograph. Her guide directed her to ring the doorbell. He said he saw Stella at the barn and would bring her in.

The bell knob, one of those brown crockery affairs that disgrace any door, hung loosely from its wire. To the stranger it looked like an abortive attempt at civilization. The bell jangled harshly as she pulled at it. The music stopped abruptly. She heard slow steps on a bare floor; then the door was flung open and Bill Plunket stood before her, bent of shoulder, crippled with rheumatism, white-haired; but in his faded blue eyes there shone a welcome that was in itself both a balm and a benediction.

"Come right in. I didn't happen to see ye comin'

along the road, but I see Alec goin' to the barn. I s'pose ye've come for the night — most strangers do that Alec brings through these parts."

She answered half on impulse, half from intuition: "If you can accommodate me, Mr. Plunket, I may want to stay more than one night." She put out her hand.

Bill Plunket took it, slender, white, shapely; he looked at it, then at its owner.

"Ye can stay just as long as ye want to, Miss —"

"Doane; my name is Alison Doane."

"— Miss Doane, for I take it ye're 'Miss', seein' ye ain't no weddin' ring on t'other hand."

It was then Alison Doane laughed — a merry, heartening laugh that filled the small bare hall. Hearing it, the saddle-maker, still holding her hand, drew her into the room beyond, saying:

"It does me good to hear that laugh o' yourn; it's like Son's. You set down, an' I'll call my girl."

He moved with some difficulty to the back door and throwing it open was confronted by Stella and Alec.

"Stella, this here is Miss Doane. She's goin' to put up with us for to-night, mebbe longer. Glad to see ye, Alec. Ye'll have to sleep in the barn, but we can feed ye all right."

The girl welcomed her guest with gentle grace and in excellent English. She at once led the way to the guest room.

6

It was an unfinished attic, a window in each gable end. One looked to the east across the rough cleared land, that should have been Alison Doane's, and still farther over the tilled and untilled acres. Here and there a farmhouse or two, with outbuildings, could be

seen indistinctly beneath over-topping shade trees. The shadowing darkness of small patches of woodland and, far away, the lowing of cattle, emphasized the quiet of approaching twilight.

From the west window, the woman, looking through the few pines at the back of the house, caught the gleam of a lake and heard the lap of its waters among the long grass or sedge.

"I think I shall want to stay here a whole month, if I may; will you let me?" she said, turning to the girl and smiling almost joyously, for she was experiencing a sensation of deliverance from the trammels of her ordinary life. She was realizing the fact that she was at last free to live her own life as she might choose, where she might choose. And just now she chose to live a month of it here, with these two interesting human beings, Bill Plunket and his half-breed daughter, in the strangely prosaic surroundings of glebe, newly turned furrow, and rough, timberless clearings.

The girl answered with a smile: "As long as you want to, but," she added almost with sadness, "you will get tired of it: they all do before that time."

Noting that smile, Alison Doane thought it lightened one of the most pathetic faces she had ever seen. It was an irregular oval, rather thin, the skin white as her own except for a coat of tan. The eyes were large, dreamy, blue-gray, with remarkably full underlids; the nose straight, the nostrils full and well-formed. But the high cheek bones and the lower part of the mouth were all Indian. She wore a coarse white blouse and a blue denim skirt. Beautifully formed, she was graceful as a fawn, with something of the swiftness and unexpectedness of its movements.

Such was Stella, the saddle-maker's half-breed daughter who was at home for the first time in five years during which she had been at a distant Government school. To the white woman, admiring her, she seemed to typify the tragedy — with the passing of the great forests of the North Star State — of that red race that once dominated this land and was the girl's by a half-inheritance.

As Alison leaned to have another look from the east window, she heard the almost noiseless steps of the girl on the stairs; then the scent of the freshly turned earth rose into her nostrils mingled with the fragrance of the pines. The earth was breathing a few times before the falling of the autumn dews.

7

For the first time in his long life Bill Plunket was brought into daily contact with a woman of "gentlepeople" breeding; for the first time into daily intercourse with the simple manners of what we call, for want of a better name, a lady at heart. He watched her deft ways with his hugger-mugger belongings; noted the order she brought out of chaos. He admired her thoroughly practical outlook on the domestic side of life. He loved to talk with her, hear her laugh, and above all to question her as to her reasons for being in just that locality; but she baffled his curiosity for a few days and purposely kept him wondering aimlessly. This in turn amused her.

The October nights were cool with heavy frosts, and the big stove in the kitchen was in full blast after supper. The atmosphere was conducive to chat and good talk. One evening Bill Plunket spoke between puffs:

"I see ye prospectin' over by Ole Olafson's this

afternoon; find anything worth investin' in to-day?" This was a daily question.

"Not to-day, Mr. Plunket." She bent to the sweater she was knitting. "I just wanted to take a look at the farm over there."

"Did ye see Olafson?"

"No, there wasn't any one at home so far as I could see. Who owns the farm, the little one just beyond his?"

"That's his brother's, a bacheldore." He chuckled to himself.

"What is it? Tell me, do," she said, ready to enjoy one of his local jokes.

"His brother's name is Hendrik. Ye see, there's been a lot o' trouble for the last ten years 'bout this piece o' land ye been looking over, though it begun a good while 'fore that with the land sharks."

Miss Doane looked up inquiringly. Plunket nodded emphatically.

"That's wot we call 'em. Ye see, if I've got the rights o' it — an' I've heard it told enough times to know — all them three hundred and twenty acres, was Government gift to two brothers in the Florida war; an' a man come along through here a good many years ago an' bought up their claims. Then another man bought him out. Seems he died, an' then the trouble begun.

"The timber-wolves don't let much timber stand long when there's nobody 'round to look after it, an' just after I moved in here from Turtle Mountain, they begun to cut the timber — best o' white pine, heavy and full grown. By the time I'd been in here ten years they was cuttin' off the oak; an' the maples was dying off, for their roots couldn't

reach to the under-surface water that had been lowered. It was a clear case o' wot they call 'trespassin' an' wot *I* call stealin'. They hadn't no right to a dog-goned stick o' that timber; but I didn't know it then or I'd have used my gun on 'em. Stealin' from a woman is a durned low-down trick, an' that's wot they was doin'.

"Next, they took all the basswood. One night 'bout eight years ago, Ole come over to read me a letter from a woman somewhere in Virginia. He wouldn't tell me her name for he said he wasn't goin' into no witness box on tax titles an' trespassin'. She said her father owned the land; that he was dead, and she wanted to get at the value now that the timber had been cut off unbeknownst to her. She asked Ole if he'd kind o' look out for her int'rest in the half section as she couldn't come out here herself. He showed me a five-dollar bill she sent to close the bargain."

He broke into a hearty laugh, so hearty that Alison Doane joined him and Stella's face wore a smile.

"Ye see Hendrik was lookin' round for a wife — ain't got one yet. They wouldn't look at him without some land; no woman will, 'round in these parts. You've got to show yer deed to 'em, an' no tax title will work now; it's got to be the genuine article here in the North Star State. So when Ole read the letter to his brother, Hendrik begun to take notice; an' he an' Ole between 'em laid their plans to get hold of the land by marriage contract between Hendrik an' the woman. He said he didn't care whether she was young or old, so long's she owned that land. So Ole wrote to her an' told her just how matters stood: that all the timber had been cut off, but that

it was mighty good farm land an' worth forty dollars an acre, for the railroad had been run so close to it there was no haulin' to speak of." He chuckled again.

"He told her he had a brother who was a bacheldore an' lookin' for some good land to kind o' develop an' a wife into the bargain; an' if she felt any in*cli*nation, she might write to him what her mind was on that pertic'ler point, an' he'd meet her more'n half way."

Alison began to laugh.

"What did she say?"

"Well, I never rightly knowed. Ole wasn't wot ye might call extra tongue-loose on that point; but I guess she settled the matter for good an' all. Anyway, she didn't lay up nothin' against Ole; he heard from her till 'bout three years ago, p'raps more, then the real rumpus begun.

"Ye see, the woman couldn't fight a monop'ly, an' that's wot she was up against, an' two thousand miles away. There was a reg'lar school o' land sharks to begin with. Then there was the folks that had done the stealin' — some o' 'em dead, an' their children not to blame for the sins o' their fathers. Then there was the monop'ly; that meant some o' the biggest an' richest men in the country; an' there was the lawyers who was workin' for the monop'ly.

"Now I want to know wot chance a woman's got to fight *that* combination? Tell me that. Ye can trap some animiles, an' shoot others, an' decoy some, an' corral the rest. But no man that handles a trap, or a gun, or a lariat, is goin' to use all three to once on a creature that can't put up a fight, not much! But that's, accordin' to my notion, just wot they've

done to that woman. That monop'ly got a grip on that half-section, an' no power on earth can make 'em let go. From all I hear they threatened her with law suits, an' badgered her with letters, an' baited her with quit-claim deeds, an' raised the deuce gen'rally.

"There wasn't no show for her. They say they own it now; an' have put up a wire fence 'round it an' been keepin' stock in there this last season. I'd give one o' Stella's cookies if I could find out what she got for it. I know she was cheated."

"I can tell you," Alison Doane spoke quietly. Plunket looked over at her inquiringly without showing surprise.

"How do you know?" was his rather abrupt question.

"Because I am the woman. And you are right — I could not fight such a combination; but the land was mine. I got eight hundred dollars for it; and I'm taking this my first trip into the heart of my country, on the strength of that money."

"By gum!" was all Plunket said for a moment; evidently he was calculating; "an' ye'd ought to had most thirteen thousand dollars without countin' the trespass. So ye're the woman — I might have known it. Ye wouldn't stayed 'round here for more'n a day if ye hadn't had some sort o' int'rest in the place."

"You're on the wrong trail, Mr. Plunket. I stay here because I like to stay with you and Stella for a few weeks."

"I'd like to ask ye just one question an' no offense meant: did *not* havin' wot was yer dues from yer father make any kind o' difference in yer livin'?"

"All the difference between a life of leisure and a life of work. I've earned my livelihood ever since my father died."

"An' those rats did that, did they?" Plunket's wrath was rising. "Ye mean ye've worked for yer livin', for yer daily bread same's other folks?"

"Just the same," Alison Doane answered with a smile. "I'm no better than others when it comes to that, and work doesn't hurt any woman provided she isn't overworked."

"Ye must have been under age when yer father died?"

"Yes, but I was over seventeen."

"And now I judge ye're 'bout twenty-seven —" Miss Doane interrupted him with the merry laugh that to hear Bill Plunket declared did his "rheumatics" good.

"Your arithmetic is all wrong, Mr. Plunket. Guess again."

"Ye can't be the shady side o' thirty?" Bill Plunket began to look troubled.

"I am thirty-seven."

"Don't tell it, Miss; nobody'd believe ye." Bill Plunket spoke so earnestly that his guest laughed again.

"I'm mad enough to use my gun on the whole kit, mad as Son was when the Injun cheated him on his pony; mad enough to kill somebody, just like him. If there was anything used to get Son wild it was for somebody to try to do him. An' you, poor girl, have been done by the toughest crowd that ever tackled a man; an' yet ye can laugh — laugh just like Son."

"That's what you said when I entered the house,

Mr. Plunket. How many sons have you? Stella speaks of Tom and Jerry, and you of McGillie and Son. Straighten it out for me, please."

Plunket, who in his earnestness had hitched himself out of his chair, sat down again with a laugh.

"I don't blame ye for wantin' to know how we stand. Ye see, Tom an' Jerry are my sons, 'reel Plunkets' as Son calls 'em. Tom is section hand on the railroad. Jerry's off fishin' up Red Lake way. McGillie is my stepson; I was married to a widow 'fore I married Jane. And Son — well, now wot shall I say? He's just Son. He ain't no blood relation, but he's nearer to me than a good many o' that kind would be if I had 'em. His name is Robert Collamore, an' he was here 'bout two weeks ago on his way north. He's been here off an' on for more'n twenty years. We both left the Turtle Mountains for good and all 'bout that time. He's been here three or four times an' he can't come too often an' he can't stay too long. He had a tough life, Bob did, up to six years ago; but he's coming out on top — that is if he don't get into this war business; he's made for it. He's on his way now to see the Injuns; he an' them was great friends. He lived with me five years in the Turtle Mountains."

"Now where are those? I am densely ignorant of my own country in spots. Tell me about it," — she put the sweater into her bag, — "and little Bob Collamore; he sounds interesting."

This opportunity of sounding the praises of his well-beloved "Son", Plunket seized, so to speak, by the hair of its head. For three mortal hours he worked that opportunity for all it was worth.

Alison Doane listened in silence, only now and then

asking a question. Stella also listened, intent, absorbed. At the end of that time, when the kitchen clock struck eleven, Alison Doane felt she knew something worth knowing about Robert Collamore, the saddle-maker's "Son."

"He's made something of himself, I can tell ye — great feller for books; an' he's been to a big school for trainin' timber experts — worked his way through and is comin' out on top; an' is in a fair way o' makin' his pile — and he sure needs all the luck comin' to him," he added as he bade his guest good-night.

8

Little by little, during her stay of a month in Minnesota, Alison Doane lived into the spirit of her new environment; and that spirit was the benign atmosphere of the saddle-maker's severely disciplined soul. Her interest in Stella and her anomalous position as a half-breed increased daily. She saw, at times, strong evidence of her red racial inheritance; at others, certain tendencies and an outlook on life that were her father's.

They discussed Stella one day as they were driving over the rough road that led to the station five miles distant. They were seated on the board seat of a low farm wagon, the body of which had been converted into a transient travelling stall for stock — some sheep and a hog Plunket was shipping to market.

"I ain't like Jane. She's all for eddication. Now, ye see, I never did think books could give ye eddication. They can give ye learnin' o' course; but I've knocked 'round enough to see that learnin' ain't eddication, an' never will be."

He was so emphatic that he slapped the reins

vigorously on the colt's back, which procedure the animal resented, with the result that there were cavortings and side-trackings which made things lively for man, woman, and beasts on the rough roadway. Plunket's objurgations in homespun vernacular were continued, forcible, and expressive. Alison Doane laughed till the tears stood in her eyes, for the hog and terrified sheep resented the performance quite as much as Plunket on his side and the colt on his, and in their own peculiar fashion. The medley of snortings, squealings, and blattings was irresistibly funny.

When things had quieted down both within and without the cart to a degree that the two could continue the conversation without running the risk of biting their tongues, owing to the high jolting of the springless cart over the little-used road — remnant of an old logging road — the saddle-maker, smiling genially, turned to his guest and explained in gentle tones:

"This damned beast needs eddicatin' — animiles do, ye know; an' humans bein' animiles, an' somp'in' else, need it a little more'n they do; an' neither one nor t'other gets it from books, now do they?"

"Indeed, we don't, Mr. Plunket; we get it through what you're flourishing a little too near the colt's left ear for my comfort," she replied, referring to the whiplash Plunket was plying in fancy aerial curves just over the head of the sensitive young horse.

Plunket laughed aloud. "Ye mean get whipped into shape by wot ye call experience, eh?"

"Yes, I've found it so."

Bill Plunket grew serious at once. "Well, I s'pose,

bein' human, ye've had to take yer medicine same as the rest o' us; but I'll be blistered if I see any reason why a woman should have it thrust down her throat by them damned land sharks. I ain't got over it yet, ye see," he added in apology for the forcibleness of his condemnation, delivered this time in no gentle tone.

"Oh, that isn't the way to look at it."

"Isn't, eh?"

"No, for if it hadn't been for those" — she turned to him with a charming smile curving her still red lips, and a glint of daring mischief in her dark blue eyes — "'damned land sharks' of your North Star State, I shouldn't be having the second 'time' of my life right here with you and Stella. Honestly, I mean it."

Bill Plunket looked at her in amazement.

"Ye mean that?" He spoke abruptly; he had thought hitherto that people of gentle blood were accustomed to good times during the greater part of their lives.

"Of course I do; and the queer part of it is that I had my first glorious 'time' within twenty miles of here."

"Ye mean ye've been here before?"

"Yes, years ago — before you settled here."

"How's that?"

"I came out here with my father, — he was looking for investments, — and I slept in a hut in the really 'big woods' for one night. I never enjoyed anything so much in my life, and I've been longing for another night just like it ever since. Alec took me through that tract on the way here. There's nothing left of that great pine forest, only farms and waste

stumpage land. Do you happen to know of any foreigners, a family of Hungarians, that used to live over there? We stayed with them that night."

"No; that must have been before my time. Those foreigners are here one day and gone the next if they don't take up land. I'm beginnin' to understand why ye come out here now."

"And Long John was one of our guides —"

"Long John?" Plunket interrupted her; he looked bewildered. "Long John is Jane's father."

"I know." She nodded assurance. "And I wanted to see him too."

"Ye did?" After those two words, which Plunket adjudged safe in the amazing circumstances, he was silent. This woman's statements were becoming incomprehensible; he would await developments.

"I had such a good time with my father, that I've always felt if ever I could get out here again I might have the chance for another." She spoke wistfully; then, with a merry laugh: "And I've 'sure' found it."

It captivated Plunket to hear her quote his own expressions; they were so incongruous — his words and the clear-ringing but gentle voice in which they were uttered.

When he spoke his own voice was slightly husky:

"Well, if bein' here with me an' Stella is wot ye call havin' a 'good time', I ain't quite so sure as I was that ye've had all ye'd ought to in this life."

Alison Doane made no answer. She looked away across the fields, some lying fallow, some plowed. Here and there huge hayricks stood out boldly against the dull horizon of overcast skies. The air was chill with a hint of snow in it. Here and there the rem-

nants of over-abundant crops lay ungathered, blackened by the recent heavy frosts. On the right an acre or two of dried faded cornstalks rustled dismally as they drove past; on the left a herd of swine were nosing for artichoke roots; farther on cattle were grazing among stumpage. She shivered slightly. Plunket noticed it.

"Ye cold? There's an extra robe under the seat."

"No — oh, no; it must be the air and the dull gray sky. The two together make me think of two or three hours on a trail through the forest just before we reached that hut. It had begun to snow."

"Wot month was that?"

"October, the very last; and Antoine —"

"Was that Antoine Guilmette?"

"Yes; did you know him?"

"Better'n I know you."

"He was our guide; we had two, him and Long John. He used to play on his clarionet for me sometimes in camp. I hoped he might be living. I wanted to find out about a boy that came to the hut that night through all the wind and sleet. I've never forgotten him — a little chap. He was with the Indians near a Chippewa village. Long John didn't speak any English then. Does he now? Perhaps he could tell me sometime."

Bill Plunket forgot to reply to her question. His mind was beginning to work, make back tracks over twenty-three years of his life's trail to the time of his quest for Jane. It behooved him to be cautious.

"Wot did the boy come for? Anything to do with them foreigners?"

"No; he had lost his dog. Antoine said she had been lost for nearly three weeks."

Bill Plunket's faded blue eyes suddenly took on the look of a hawk when it circles slowly above its earth-victim; he was about to pounce on his clue.

"Such a little lad. We felt so sorry for him. His dog died just as he got there."

"'Bout how old was he?"

"I don't know; father thought he might be eleven or twelve."

"Did you learn his name?"

"Only his Indian name. Antoine called him 'Little Owl.' I suppose he must have been a half-breed, but he didn't look like one."

"He's no more of a half-breed than you an' me." Plunket's tone was a shade testy. "I know that boy. Yer speakin' 'bout the dog put me on the scent."

She turned to him, looking eagerly into his face. "You knew him? Can you tell me anything about him?"

"I've told ye 'bout as much as there is to tell. That boy is 'Son', Bob Collamore. The Injuns used to call him Little Owl, or Bob-Little Owl."

"But I thought you said —"

Plunket interrupted her: "I know I put ye on the wrong trail by tellin' ye them foreigners was here 'fore my time. An' that's just as 't was; but the year before I come over here to settle, I come here with Bob to fetch Jane back to the mountains. She'd been visitin' her father a spell," he added in an off-hand manner.

"Then perhaps you heard of me before Hendrik Olafson tried to propose to me for the sake of the land?"

"Well, now I think o' it, I *had* heard o' ye, an'

that's the truth. Not from Bob. He's close-mouthed, an' was so choked up over the bitch he couldn't, or wouldn't talk 'bout wot happened that night. All I knew was wot Jane said Long John and Kinni-kinnik — that's his grandchild — told her."

"Kinni-kinnik too! I'm beginning to find the trail I've lost all these years. She was such a darling."

"Bet yer life she was, reg'lar charmer. She's married to my stepson, McGillie, I was tellin' ye 'bout t'other day; he traps for the Fur Company. She's got two children, an' both o' 'em havin' good schoolin' up at Groundhouse — they call it 'The New Mission'; 't ain't so far from Winnipegosis. Some of our Injuns are on the reservation there."

"How strange." Alison Doane spoke more to herself than to Plunket. "What more did Kinni-kinnik tell Jane?" Somehow she could not call her Mrs. Plunket.

"She had a good deal to say, so Jane said, an' for quite a while — long after we'd all got back to the mountains — 'bout a white girl an' a hut in the woods, an' how the white girl's father gave the girl a silver dollar, and the white girl gave it to her, Kinni-kinnik, ye know. She wears it round her neck to this day, — they say she ain't never took it off, — on a bead necklace McGillie sent her after he'd been away from the mountain. I hadn't thought o' this for twenty-two years till ye mentioned the boy *an'* the dog; then it come back to me. Son was hard hit, losing his bitch that way. He loved that dog, an' the boy was the bitch's god — that's wot he was."

Then he told her of their camping on the south trail when they came home to the mountains from the

fort, and of that night incident in which both bitch and boy figured largely.

When he finished the woman's cheeks were wet with tears, and the surprised colt was receiving extra and undeserved flicks of the lash on his flanks. These he bore right bravely, for all along the rough road Bill Plunket had been continuing his education of the animal. The saddle-maker felt the need of relieving the situation and, noticing this improvement in his horse, turned to the woman beside him, saying:

"He's gettin' whipped into shape like the rest o' us; bearin' it noble too. We're going to run close to the track just round that piece o' woodland ye see, an' if there's a train comin' he'll have to do nobler; he's got an awful grudge against 'em. Ye set tight, if ye hear one, an' trust to yer old friend an' the best harness I've made in the North Star State, will ye?"

"I'd trust you anywhere, with anything." Alison Doane spoke impulsively, smiling into his face.

She saw a faint color creep up Bill Plunket's cheek to his temple. She could not know that in his old age he was tasting something of the sweetness of congenial companionship, a companionship that, born under another star, his life might have offered him in his youth or middle age.

The train did not pass; but the colt's education continued until they drove into the barn where Stella unharnessed him.

9

Before she left the saddle-maker's, two weeks afterwards, Miss Doane learned much from her host and his daughter of their Indian relatives and their collateral friendships. During this time she

received a letter from Evelyn Carrolly in Winnipeg saying that she and her husband expected her to meet them about the second week of November in that city, and from there they would make their journey northward to Groundhouse, the terminus of a branch line of railroad. Any failure on her part to meet them, Evelyn declared, would have for penalty almost the breaking of friendship. She was to expect a telegram now at any time, setting the date on which they were to start.

On reading this, Alison Doane regretted for a moment that she had given her promise to be with them and go on with them. She had planned, — long before they made the journey north together, — to use the eight hundred dollars, the sacrifice-price for her lands, in seeing certain portions of her own country and Canada which she had long hoped, without any definite prospect of fulfilment, to visit. Now that she was about to realize her ambition, she wanted to be free to see these lands in her own way; and the thraldom of close attendance on Evelyn Carrolly, while making the trip entirely by train, a mode of travel not in her original plans, was something she did not like to contemplate, much as she liked her cousin.

What she wanted was something like what she was about to leave, what she knew she ought to leave before Jane arrived to complicate the household relations. She had read deep into her saddle-maker's heart — she called him hers now — all unbeknown to him; and she recognized, also, the conditions facing his daughter. Stella had talked once with her as woman to woman, only once. The girl was uncommunicative without being at all taciturn. She told

the older woman of her trouble. She said she was only a half-breed; that she loved a white man whom she would follow to the ends of the world if he would permit her.

"But, Stella," she said, on that day when they spoke together so intimately, "he may love you, my dear; and if he loves you the fact of being what you call a half-breed would make no difference to him and should not to you." Alec was in her mind as she spoke.

"He does not love me; he never will love me," was all Stella would say; "but he was so kind to me, I would follow him everywhere if he would let me."

Alison Doane perceived that the girl's point of view was that of the young squaw and not of the white woman, and said no more. But she charged herself with a certain wardship of Stella, for the girl's isolation among her mixed people was only too plain to see and, in the white woman's eyes, had already certain elements of the tragic.

10

Alison Doane herself was half Scotch, her mother having been born in Montreal of Scotch parentage. Her father was an American, a native of Maryland.

She was eleven years old when she lost her mother; but of what that mother had told her only child, the greater part was registered clearly and indelibly in the little girl's memory. All her life long she had been hoping, planning, to make her favorite story come true. It was told to her again and again by her mother, as the two sat together in the winter evenings by the bright wood fire in their home on Chesapeake Bay. Mrs. Doane was the niece of a

trader in the famous Hudson's Bay Company, and once with her mother, Alison's grandmother, made the journey from Montreal to one of the Company's posts to visit him and his family.

Her mother's description of that far northland, her long journey by water to Norway House, her visit there and the sight of the famous "Indian Hall"; her vivid relation of what she had seen and enjoyed at another far away Old Lake Post at which her great uncle was trader; her account of the coming of the canoe brigades bringing the French half-breeds with the rich furs from the hinterland; of the songs of these voyageurs, — she used to sing them to her little daughter until the child could sing them, — their camps, their gay and perilous life in the wilderness and over the waterways of the north, fascinated the child, held her entranced. She pinned her childish faith to her mother's promise to take her into that wonderland, sometime when she should be old enough.

Such seed as this, sown by the mother in the well-prepared ground of a child's fresh imagination, brought forth in after years a hundredfold. At the time of her intense grief for her loss, the reliving in imagination of what that mother had told her helped her to forget, for a little, her sorrow. In the nearly seven care-free years with her father that followed, she was able to realize in part, by means of her urgent pleading to be taken with him on his trip into northern Minnesota, something of her vision. Later, in her womanhood and the years of monotonous work-a-day living, this dream of realizing sometime in the dim future that journey of her mother's into the heart of the big wonderful land, which was such a revela-

tion to her, lightened her daily task; refreshed her in thought, and stimulated her efforts to save.

As she had not been able, lacking the money, to fight for the denuded pine lands which were rightfully hers, she determined to do the next best: take what she could get for them and by means of that satisfy her longing to revisit Minnesota, and the Canadian land of her mother's birth.

Her cousin's husband, Philip Carrolly, was interested in the future development of an extensive pulp wood plant far north of the Old Lake Post and the erection of two large mills in that region. In correspondence with the trader there, having mentioned to him the fact of Alison's connection with a former trader, he found that gentleman was the grandson of an old acquaintance of Alison's great uncle. Mr. Carrolly was at once urged to accept the hospitality of the house whenever his business interests should call him that far north, and Alison Doane was included in this invitation.

II

In the few remaining days of her stay with the saddle-maker and his daughter, Alison knew how, as only a woman of quick sympathies can know, to secure the bonds of their unforeseen friendship. For the time their interests were hers. She intended to make them feel that they would always be hers.

"You say Kinni-kinnik lives at Groundhouse, so I shall look her up — of course, not on the reservation?"

It was their last evening together. The cold was increasing. Ice rimmed the lake behind the house. It was already the first of November. Alison had been frying doughnuts, a delectable of which Bill

Plunket was inordinately fond; it was also in a way an object lesson for Stella. He finished a big generous mouthful of the delicately browned ring of sweetened bread before he spoke:

"No, she ain't there. McGillie built a log house, so he told me the last time he was here, a reg'lar settler's cabin. It's big enough for the family, he says, an' Kinni-kinnik 's a mighty good housekeeper — got her learnin' at school just like Stella. He's goin' to put up a frame house, he says, when he can settle down reg'larly to raisin' some crops. He just comes an' goes now. He's done well, McGillie has; been savin', too, an' his wife has helped him."

"I shall try to see her very soon after I get there. I do wish I might see Colin McGillie too."

Bill Plunket smiled. "He ain't wot ye call handsome, McGillie ain't, but he's true blue." He burst into a mighty laugh. "Get him to tell ye how he an' Bob fought for Kinni-kinnik sometime — it's better fun than seein' a billy-goat butting a tenderfoot. But I can tell ye Kinni-kinnik's lucky to get him; he's faithful as the sun. I don't know where he is now, an' I guess Kinni-kinnik ain't any wiser. I s'pose he is a hundred miles or so north of Groundhouse. Ever been on a reservation?"

"Never; all this is before me. About what year did your Indian neighbors leave the Turtle Mountains?"

"They left two or three families at a time. Let me see — I got out in 1894 just 'bout when the Government had begun to take notice o' the timber. If I ain't makin' a mistake, I think it was the very next year the Government bit out a slice, 'bout seventy thousand acres, for a kind o' timber reserve,

an' 'long 'bout 1906 they made it a reg'lar forest reserve. It wasn't no place for squatters an' Injuns, an' little by little the Injuns moved on.

"Great place, though, them Turtle Mountains. Bob told me when he was here last month he was goin' through 'em again just for old time's sake. He ain't been there since he left twenty-one years ago. I'll bet he'll find a big change. It's a good place to keep stock — I kept some; grass grows knee-deep all 'round the sloughs; an' all over the burnt places, brulés we call 'em, there's the best pasture goin'. An' the fishin' in them lakes, — Lord! it makes me homesick just to think of it, — the maskinonge, big fat-bellied fellers, some o' 'em weighing twenty pounds; an' good wild-eatin', partridge an' duck aplenty.

"Since the settlers begun to come in there there's been fires on the mountain an' not much timber left. I was nothin' but a squatter, but I never set fire to so much as a raspberry patch in all the years I lived there."

"And where is Bob Collamore now?" In Alison Doane's consciousness the saddle-maker's "Son" always presented himself as the boy she had seen so long ago. In her imagination he had never grown up; hence her free use of his name.

"I dunno where Bob is now. He's what I call a roamer; he's never staid put anywheres except when he was at that place for trainin' experts. He told me he was goin' up to the mountain from here, an' then, he said, he was goin' on some business to Ottawa an' afterwards up north — he didn't say wot, an' he ain't the kind ye want to ask questions 'bout wot ye might call his personal property. But I'll

bet I ain't far wrong if I say it's somp'in' to do with this war business. He ain't goin' to stay out o' this fight if I know him, an' I know him better'n any other man on earth does, seein' I brought him up. But if ye see McGillie, he'll likely tell ye."

"I am beginning to fear I shan't even see McGillie. I don't know how long my cousins are going to stay in the north, till we get there; indeed, I'm sure they don't know themselves."

"Stella can send a postcard to McGillie to find out, but it ain't likely to reach him. They don't have no reg'lar mail this side o' the North Pole an' the Saskatchewan, not yet."

"I feel as if I knew it already, just hearing about all your friends there."

"Ye'll have to take plenty o' clothes with ye up there, I can tell ye."

"I am going to look out for that in Winnipeg."

So their talk drifted on rather aimlessly. They knew the cozy evening chats in the warm kitchen were to be things of the past. They went early to bed, for the start was to be directly after breakfast on the morrow.

The three drove the five miles to the station in a double-seated spring wagon. Jane had preëmpted their only "buggy" for her excursion to Red Lake Reservation. The air was crisping cold, clear, filled with brilliant low sunshine. The heavy frost, with all the effect of snow, lay sparklingly white on stumpage land, furrow, glebe, pastures, and on the roofs of the isolated farmhouses. Even the rails running westwards to the horizon were white.

They said but little, the three, as they waited for the train at the small bare station. The saddle-

maker leaned from the wagon — he could not leave it at the critical moment of the train's arrival, owing to the colt's still undisciplined nerves — to grasp the hand held up to him.

"Ye'll come again, I take it."

"As surely as I live." So answered Alison Doane, for she loved this old man whose influence must continue to be felt by her so long as she should live.

"If ye see Colin an' Kinni-kinnik, an' any o' the others up at the New Mission, ye tell 'em the old man don't forget 'em, *never*, an' that if my rheumatics would let me I'd like to visit with 'em all again, same's we used to in Turtle Mountains."

"I shan't forget, and I shall stop over here to see you on my way back, if only for a day. Stella, you have promised to write to me often."

The girl nodded and smiled.

"There's no knowin', ye might run across Bob on yer trails north and south; if ye do, ye tell him from me to let me know 'bout that war business as soon as he knows himself."

"I surely will if I ever see him, and I do so hope I may. He was such a weepy boy the last time I saw him, just crying his heart out — inside, I mean. My own heart ached for him."

The train came to a stop, and Bill Plunket found his hands full in managing the surprised and terrified colt.

Alison Doane had a glimpse of him as the wagon gyrated out of sight behind the station, and a vision of Stella attempting to climb in over the tailboard.

II

AT THE NEW MISSION

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AT THE NEW MISSION

1

The multiple roots of the Saskatchewan are fed from the snows and glaciers of the Rockies. Its two great branches, the North and South Saskatchewan, flow together at "the Forks", seven hundred miles to the east of their snow-fed mountain sources.

It is a magnificent, natural, and almost equilateral triangle so formed. Its base is the mountain-bastioned wilderness of western Alberta. Its sides are the two noble eastward-flowing rivers. Its apex is the junction of the two in the province of Saskatchewan.

The territory, hundreds of thousands of square miles in extent, enclosed in this vast Canadian triangle, has been the scenic setting for the thrilling drama and final tragedy of the great Indian tribes of the North.

2

From "the Forks" eastward two hundred miles, the river skirts the dense evergreen forests of the sub-arctic North; but thence onwards to its far distant mouth on the shore of Winnipeg, its characteristics are completely changed. They are those of a vast delta: marshes, thousands of lakes, a myriad of intricate waterways — highways for the old French

voyageurs, for the Indian hunters and trappers from the hinterland.

Beyond the northern bank lies an immense network of waterways extending into subarctic regions. For a hundred miles along its southern bank stretch the marshlands, silent save for the rustle of reeds, the whistling wings of wild duck, the "wailing call" of wild fowl on their southward flight.

Its entire delta course for hundreds of miles duplicates in a curious fashion, but far more grandly, the complex water system of the Lake of the Woods, Rainy River, its lake-like expanses and shallows. Southeast of these marvellous Saskatchewan water courses, that make of that far northern region a continental Venice with its myriads of connecting water highways for intercourse, traffic, and exploration, lie the Great Lakes of Manitoba — the Great Sea, the Little Sea, the Strait of God. These, again, duplicate the Great Lakes system of the United States southeast of the international water boundary of the Rainy River system.

From west to east along the river's entire length, are found the famous clearing houses of the great Fur Company. From Jasper House of the old days, in the Canadian Rockies, to far away Norway House on Winnipeg, they have formed and form, as it were, great trade ganglia for that north land.

North and south of the mighty river, from far beyond desolate Lac la Ronge to the upland forests of the Turtle Mountains, there have been established from time to time, during the centuries, the multiple lesser trading posts of the Company. These serve as smaller nerve centres, their traffic being fed by the arterial circulation of the Canadian waters through

the swamps and woods of the hinterland, so rich in that wild life which yields to trapper and hunter the furs that find their way to the centres of civilization.

Many of these smaller posts no longer exist. With their passing has passed the old Turtle Mountain House. The tracking of a continent, and the competition of constantly extending railroad systems have changed in many ways the old order. The railroads are extending their iron fingers northwards, ever northwards — tapping here, tapping there the hitherto undreamed-of resources of the great sub-arctic regions. The mysterious hinterland has, at last, been brought into contact with the borderland.

Upon the tracking of this great land has followed the segregation of the Indian tribes of the North; and to-day many of the reservations, large and small, may be found in juxtaposition to a trading post.

Prior, however, to the coming of the iron horses whose race course is the breadth of a continent, long before the Indians were placed on reservations, missions, small and large, were established here and there among the tribes of the northern wilderness. Hence it is not unusual to find mission and reservation in part amalgamated.

Many a pioneer's cabin on the confines of a reservation has aspired to and attained, with the coming of a branch line of a railroad, the dignity of a settlement. Many an insignificant settlement has thriven, out of all proportion to its size, by the extension of the logging interests to the northwards — its own little railroad community serving for a more southern base.

Groundhouse, or the New Mission, is one of these. Here the hinterland touches the little community fast growing into something more important, and a

traveller finds himself in a curiously apportioned land where the whistle of an engine at the front door of the settlement might possibly drown the moan of moose at the back.

This was a part of the charm which, with each new day, cast anew its spell on Alison Doane. Of her acquaintance with Kinni-kinnik and her children, with Carmastic, Chum's wife, and her little pappooses on the reservation just out of the town, she had made no mention to her cousins. These were the things of her life that did not enter into their particular lives. Alison did not consider it necessary to explain that for which no explanation was asked or needed.

3

"I don't see what you can find so fascinating in that reservation; one visit was enough for me." Mrs. Carrolly had run out of the common topics of conversation and begun to turn the heel of another stocking. She counted aloud, and Alison did not interrupt her until she had finished.

The Carrollys were waiting for the substantial freezing of the waters of river, lake, and creek in order to make their trip to the incipient pulp-mill plant many miles to the north. Before their arrival, the foreman and his wife, who were to accompany them, took advantage of the fine October weather and practically open waters to go northwards to their station and settle before the severe weather should set in. Mr. Carrolly was waiting at Ground-house for some further instructions from the company that was financing the lumber enterprise of which he was chief promoter, as well as director, and for Davies, the forestry expert, to go with them to try out the situation in the north from an expert's

point of view. Mrs. Carrolly was growing impatient at the delay.

Alison was sitting at the window of the one hotel in town, watching the passing of a curious mixture of humanity that drew her interest with the strength of a magnet. She turned to Mrs. Carrolly.

"It's the whole thing that is fascinating — the people, the settlement, marshes, even the railroad station away up here in this wilderness; think of it! And this wonderful coming of winter here — I've *seen* these waters freeze, heard them too."

Mrs. Carrolly dropped her ball of yarn into her knitting bag.

"I haven't the remotest idea what you mean, Alison; but if you can find *this* sort of thing fascinating, you are welcome to it, and every detail of it. I couldn't endure it a moment if it weren't for you and Phil, and the return, sometime, to New York and my special duties." She sighed audibly.

Alison repressed a smile. She was intimately acquainted with what Mrs. Carrolly called her "duties."

"Anyway, I intend to stick by Phil; he wouldn't enjoy anything without me." She spoke with comfortable assurance. "And the trip to the plant will be something new. Of course we shall have to rough it."

"I shall love it all. It's just what I've been longing for all my life." Alison spoke enthusiastically, ignoring the fact, that of what appealed to her Evelyn Carrolly had no conception.

Mrs. Carrolly looked up suddenly from her knitting; there was a curiously incredulous and tolerant lift to her eyebrows.

"You're queer, Alie." That was all she said, but it expressed a full quarto volume of what she was thinking.

Alison Doane laughed her merry laugh of which her cousin was always envious. "I know I must be, dear, if you and Phil say so. But I mean it: I *am* having a royal good time; the only drawback is that it will not last long enough."

"There's Phil!" Mrs. Carrolly exclaimed, hearing his step in the hall. She flew to the door and, opening it wide, welcomed him as if he had just returned from an Arctic expedition. It was her way, and her husband liked it. She flung her arms about his neck and gave him what Alison called a simulacrum of a kiss; it was landed anywhere on her husband's devoted head from crown, to ear, or neck.

"Any news, dear?"

"I should say so." He held out a package of letters and a telegram. "Look at that! All our plans for a quick get-away from here upset." He sat down with a discouraged *flump* in an up-to-date Grand Rapids rocking chair, and Mrs. Carrolly, a roly-poly little woman, perched herself on the arm.

"Let's hear all about it, Phil. If we have to stay here, it will be all the better for Alie." There was a slight sarcasm in her tone.

"How's that?" Phil Carrolly looked at Alison inquiringly.

"Never mind her, Phil; it's only Evelyn's nonsense. Tell us the news."

"Davies can't come."

"Can't come?" Mrs. Carrolly echoed, distinct disappointment in her tone. "What do you mean?"

"Mean what I say. He is laid up for the winter,

and they're trying to get in touch with another man, don't say who, to take over the job and join us here; for this work must be done if I stay up here all winter."

Mrs. Carrolly groaned. "Oh, Phil!"

"I know that 'Oh, Phil.' I've heard it too many times to mistake it, my dear." Her husband spoke testily. "But please understand that 'Oh, Phil' or no 'Oh, Phil', I'm going to see this thing through. I haven't left my good hot-water-heated home to come up here halfway to the North Pole, and go back without trying out that new investment. An expert is just now the keystone of my arch; if I don't get him the whole thing will fall to pieces. There doesn't happen to be a limited Pullman from New York, in these parts. You see what he says." He handed her the telegram; she read aloud:

"'Advise you by wire within ten days, not before; letter follows.'"

Mrs. Carrolly, seeing her husband's state of mind, suddenly tacked, veering suddenly into other waters well oiled by her wifely and really sound common sense.

"Ten days? Oh, that isn't so bad, Phil. I was thinking of ten months when you first spoke. Alison will be only too delighted to stay right on; and, you know, dear, I'm only too glad to help out even if we end by camping on the Arctic Circle. I don't believe I could *feel* farther north even there." She popped a kiss, or something that sounded like one, on the small bald spot on the top of her husband's much-troubled head. Mr. Carrolly looked into her face and smiled.

"You're a brick, Eve. I didn't know how you would take it."

"Didn't know! Why, Phil Carrolly," she protested, withdrawing in mock indignation from his detaining hand; "you ought to be ashamed of yourself to say such a thing, much less think it, of the wife of your bosom."

She fluttered away to her travelling tea-basket to make the tea, which they found so delectable because her making of it was an art, declaring hot drink, in this climate, to be a continuous and necessary "pick-me-up."

"I thought I had better come back here and talk it over with you girls before wiring any answer," her husband remarked, comfortably sipping his tea.

"You are a dear, Philip Carrolly; that's just like you, always thinking first of me." She beamed on him over her cup.

Carrolly looked at his wife with an indulgent smile; then he turned a quizzical look in Alison's direction. But she was apparently oblivious.

"As for me, Phil," she said, "I've just been telling Evelyn I can't get enough of this life here; so you won't expect me to go into mourning because we're kept here a few days longer."

"Glad you take it so, Alie. It isn't every man can find such backers as you two women, bless you. Being gratefully appreciative, I'll proceed to drop a bomb into your camp. I know it's dead slow here for you, Eve — you need something new to brace you up; and I don't believe half you say, Alie. How does it strike you to go up the lake by sleigh as far as the Old Lake Post and make your visit there while I am killing time here, for ten days, waiting to hear from headquarters and the new man?"

"I won't stir one step without you, Phil Carrolly."

Mrs. Carrolly spoke emphatically. "Alison can do just as she pleases, of course. I will wait to go on with you —"

"Then there will be no visit for you, my dear, for when I once get started with the new man and all our outfit I don't stop to visit on the way, except for one night to take advantage of our host's hospitality."

"What do you say to that, Alison?" Mrs. Carrolly inquired rather eagerly.

"I'm torn in two. I want to visit at the Old Post — it's what I came for — and I want to stay here, there is so much to interest me." Mrs. Carrolly sent an expressive look in her husband's direction.

"Well, if you will take my advice you'll see the Old Post first, and trust to luck for seeing more of the New Mission another time. I do believe you like it well enough to settle here."

"Almost," Alison admitted with a smile; "but I am going to act on your advice, Evelyn, and get in that visit at the post in case something should happen to the new man to lay him up too, for then you and Phil would be off at short notice; and I do so want to see it, not only for my own sake but for mother's."

"Of course you do, Alie dear; and it's the only sensible thing for you to do in the circumstances. Perhaps Phil and I — all three of us, I mean — can stop on our way back from the plant."

"Well, that's settled," said her husband. "Another cup of tea, Eve, and then I'll go and send a telegram to the company that everything is O. K. and we will wait here for the new man."

4

After Mr. Carrolly had left them, Alison spoke suddenly:

"How did you know, Evelyn?"

Mrs. Carrolly, surprised and puzzled, stopped short in the wiping of the teacups that Alison had washed in a tin basin purchased at the one shop, a department affair in its way.

"Know what?"

"Know that you truly loved Phil."

"Know how I loved Phil?" Mrs. Carrolly was reduced to a mere echo.

"Mn —"

"I declare, Alison, you switch from one thing to another so fast I can't follow you." In her amazement she put the wiped cup back into the basin, an act that in the circumstances Alison let pass without protest. "I was just planning everything all out in my mind for your trip to the Old Post and thinking you were doing the very same thing, and here you ask me how I know I love my husband! My dear, you *are* preposterous at times. What do you want to know for?"

Alison laughed; she could not help it. Her cousin's tone of indignation mingled with condescension proved too much for her sense of humor; however, she persisted.

"But tell me truly, how did you know you loved Phil twenty years ago? I didn't ask you how you know you love him now. Do tell me," she added with a merry look in her blue eyes; "it will help me —"

"Help you?" Mrs. Carrolly repeated vacantly. "Whatever has got into you to-day? You don't mean — Alison Doane!" she exclaimed in crescendo tones and excitement, "you don't mean you are thinking of being married — not really —"

A peal of laughter interrupted her, and hearing it Evelyn Carrolly laughed with her. It struck her as so perfectly absurd that Alison at thirty-seven should ask such a question.

"Oh, Evelyn, I do believe you think every trail for a woman ends in a man —"

"Why, of course I do; and didn't I tell Phil that very thing after we left you on the station platform at Bemidji? *I* knew well enough that you would never go off alone, nosing around those old pine lands, that were no longer yours, and no money in them as Phil told you in my presence, unless there were a man on your horizon. Now sit down here with me and tell me all about it. I've just *prayed*, yes, you may laugh, but I *have*, for this day — and sometime you will realize it." She seated herself in the rocking chair, and Alison again at the window.

"Now tell me, there's a dear."

"Well, I will own up to you, Evelyn," — Mrs. Carrolly leaned forward on her chair, her hands clasped, tense with anticipation, — "and I don't mind telling you. There *was* a man in the case —"

"Didn't I know it! Didn't I tell Phil I felt it in my very bones!" Evelyn forgot that this was an inspired invention of the moment, but she repeated it to her husband afterwards as a very literal truth, although he failed to recall her anatomical statement.

"You see, he proposed to me —"

"No, not really!" In her excitement Evelyn was totally unaware of her contradiction; she intended her words only for an expression of amazement.

"Yes, about three years ago; he wrote to me through his brother."

"Why didn't he write himself?" It was a prac-

tical question. Alison recognized it as such and answered accordingly.

"I think he lacked the courage. You see, I did own that land at that time, and I think he felt I might doubt his love for me and think him not quite disinterested as to the land. He lived near there — the pine lands, I mean."

"Oh, he did? Well, that only confirms my intuitions. I said to Phil, let a woman alone for having intuitions. Now come right to the point, Alison. Tell me if you have any idea of marrying the man, who he is, and what are his prospects. I can't somehow fancy you caring for a man who is not city bred. Did you see him, and what was he doing out there? Looking for investments? Most men out this way" — Mrs. Carrolly took in all the country between the forty-eighth and sixtieth parallel of latitude in the expressive sweep of her hand — "are looking for investments or prospecting."

Alison thought it time to stem the flow of speech and speculation. "No, I am not going to marry him, and so it would be hardly fair to him to give more details about such an affair. But I just thought I would like to know how a woman knows she loves a man —"

Mrs. Carrolly pouted a little. "You are making fun of me, Alison Doane, and treating the really sacred things of life too lightly."

Hearing this pronouncement, Alison laughed again without restraint.

"Oh, Evelyn, I'm thinking of the nights you pinched me to keep me awake just for the sake of talking about this very matter; and I was sixteen and you were nineteen —"

"Oh, well, if you're going back nearly a quarter of a century, I may as well get my knitting and we'll have a regular séance."

She made a feint of rising. Alison put out a hand to detain her. She wanted an answer before her cousin grew absorbed in turning the remainder of that heel.

"No, truly, Evelyn, I'm in dead earnest —"

"You act so," interpolated Mrs. Carrolly scornfully, but biting her lips to keep from smiling. Alison was really too absurd. She wondered if she had thrown away another good match.

"Do tell me how you knew?"

"How I knew? Why — well, I knew; that's all. One can't define those things off-hand."

"But how did you know that Phil was the man — no other, I mean, in the whole world for you?"

"Good gracious, Alison," Mrs. Carrolly looked slightly startled, "there you go again. Who ever said I thought Phil was the only man in the whole world! I know Phil is Phil, and the dearest ever; but you have one thing to learn, Alison Doane," — she looked at her with a sharp challenge in her rather keen blue eyes, — "a woman can love her husband devotedly and yet not be oblivious to the fact that there *are* other men in the world. It warps a woman to see but one man in her universe. It warps her judgment and — and appreciation of others. That's where I find you so narrow."

Alison nodded understandingly. "I know. But tell me about Phil."

"Why, there isn't much to tell. All the girls were crazy to get him, and he devoted himself to me — you know how handsome he was then. And he

loved me and asked me to marry him, if you *will* have details, and that's how I knew I loved him. Now I hope you're satisfied. I'm going to finish this heel before he gets back. I shall devote every minute to him now during this ' waiting 'round.' You see, I know when Phil needs me; and if there is one thing he hates it is for me not to look at him when he's talking, and how can I when I'm knitting stockings?"

It was all so delightfully illogical that Alison found nothing to say, although at thirty-seven she would have given much if she could have been enlightened, by ever so small a beam, along the way in the direction in which her question pointed. At least, she had had a bit of fun at Evelyn's expense in telling her about Farmer Hendrik's marriage intentions. It would keep Evelyn guessing for a while.

5

The next day Alison walked out to Kinni-kinnik's house, a modest log hut, well built, with a second story loft and a few windows — a good type of the practical settler's home. A board walk led from the front door to the gate. In the background, across the clearing, the pointed tips of a dense stand of spruce accented the hard unflecked blue of the November sky.

She had been a frequent visitor here since her coming two weeks before. The children were at school, and the two women sat down for a chat, Kinni-kinnik speaking English in her own way. She had learned a little from her small adorer, Bob Collamore, during her childhood in the Turtle Mountains; had learned much more in the school after

Indians removed to Groundhouse, and most from her husband, Colin McGillie, during the twelve years of their married life.

"I want to know, Mrs. McGillie, if you will go over to the reservation with me to-morrow? I want to see the old medicine-man once more before I go. I expect to leave here any day now, but I am only going as far as the Old Lake Post. My cousins will meet me there."

"I will go, yes; but you, why must you leave?"

"I want to see the trading post, because my mother visited there with her mother when she was a young girl; my grandmother was the trader's sister."

"Then you belong here; you must not leave us. My children will miss you — and the cakes," she added, her gentle brown eyes fixed on her guest with something like adoration.

"I expect we shall all be back again in a few weeks, and then — who knows but I may decide to stay here for a while? I can do so if I choose. And I like to be here with you and yours. I would like to see your husband too."

"I want you to stay, but the winter is so cold here — not like the Turtle Mountains where we lived; can you bear it?"

"Oh, any amount of cold weather in such a climate as this."

"My little one, who is coming, I call him my snow-bird, for he comes in the deep of winter; my two girls come in summer; but a boy, you know, he can bear cold like his father."

"You seem very sure of this little son of yours, Mrs. McGillie."

"Yes, this time I am sure; I have a charm for a

son." Alison looked at her inquiringly. Kinni-kinnik nodded assurance.

"Yes; it belongs to a wise woman of my tribe; she lives on the reservation; she is not from the Turtle Mountains. She gives it to me. I cannot tell you about it; then it would not work. But I am sure this time."

"I shall want to stay to see him. What will you call him — Snowbird? What is the Cree for that?"

Kinni-kinnik smiled, showing both sets of her still white and even teeth.

"No, that is my name for him before he comes. When he is on earth he gets another. He will be christened —"

"Christened? I thought you said something about a charm." Alison failed to sound the Indian mind at that moment. Kinni-kinnik enlightened her.

"Yes, he will be christened in the church. They have a silver bowl, an' water will be put on his head. They warm it — an' it makes me laugh that they think an Indian man-child should fear a little cold water. An' I belong to that church; it was my husband's wish. But the Indian heart does not forget. I remember what I am, what my fathers were; an' when the white man's prayers, that they have taught me, do not bring what I want most — a little son — I go to follow the paths of my fathers and pray Indian-way for a boy, pray with the charm I wear on my left breast. It is here," she said, laying her hand over her heart; "I dare not show it to you. It comforts me; it will bring me my son."

"And what will he be christened?"

"Robert Collamore McGillie; it is the name of

my husband's blood-brother. He was a white boy in the Turtle Mountains; we all knew him, my mother an' father, an' the medicine-man, an' old Flying Loon, his sister, an' my two brothers — they will team for the loggers this year — all loved him."

It seemed to Alison Doane, on hearing this name from the Indian woman's lips, as if the trail of the boy she had never forgotten was over all this north land. She was glad to be following it. It renewed her youth, brought back the joyous days of her girlhood. But it was no time to tell the Indian woman of her slight connection with that boy; this could well wait.

"I do not know; but we shall see him soon. My husband sent me the card; read it." She handed her a postcard that lay on the kitchen table. "It come from Winnipegosis, see? It come yesterday."

Alison read it. "'Me and Bob leave next week for home. Tell Carmastic, Chum, and the boys.'"

"Our medicine-man calls a council, Colin has told me; an' my husband, an' my people, an' Little Owl will be there — we called him that in the mountain. Carmastic calls them. Colin sent the word to Little Owl."

"What is it all about, do you know?" Alison Doane's interest in these people of another race was increasing with every word Kinni-kinnik spoke, and she spoke directly to the point.

Kinni-kinnik shook her head. "No. Indian women do not sit in council with their men. I am told it is the white woman's custom; my girls tell me it is so — they hear it in the school. Bob-Little Owl was here once in all these many summers and winters. His coming makes us glad."

"He must have been a very bright and lovable boy, Mrs. McGillie. Mr. Plunket told me about that same boy and his friends; he said all of you loved him."

The expression of Kinni-kinnik's face was thoughtful. A look of gentle patience came into her brown eyes.

"Yes, we loved him. I loved him. You see the little burning cloud that falls down the sky at night? One fell last night. It made a fire-path in the sky; they fall fast in this month. I see it — how do you call it? Colin told me; I forget."

"Shooting star — meteor?"

"That is it. He come like that in my life on the mountain, an' like that he has went. I loved him; by the custom of my people I would have went with him; he did not want me. I would have worked for him, cooked for him, cared for him, as a good squaw cares. He wanted nothing of me. I love him always — not as I love my husband; I am now your white way married to Colin. But my heart tells me I was young when he was young. I would have followed him into all the lands my girls tell me about; it is the custom of my people. If he had left me for a white woman, — like my Aunt Jane thought the saddle-maker in the mountain left her, an' that Little Owl was the white woman's son, — I would do what my aunt done by the saddle-maker: I would took the children he give me, an' left him; never trobbled him — no, never. Yes, my children I would took with me, but my love for him I could not take from him. It was not mine to take. It was his."

Alison listened in amazement at this revelation

of a child-love persisting as a woman's in the mind of this Indian wife and mother.

"How old were you, Mrs. McGillie, when —"

Kinni-kinnik interrupted her. "Call me Kinni-kinnik; they all do call me that," she said with the winning smile that once caught little Bob Collamore's lonely boy-heart with its charm.

"And what will you call *me* then, Kinni-kinnik? I have always wanted to call you that, because you have always been spoken of by that name to me."

Kinni-kinnik looked at her shyly, but hesitated to speak. In her eyes this white woman was beautiful, dark-haired, and so clear-skinned, so blue-eyed, so gentle in her ways, so merry at times, — she laughed like Little Owl, she told herself, — so interested in her and hers. Dared she call her by the name by which she was already known on the reservation? The name Carmastic had given her for her kind thought of him, and her kindlier deeds to ease his aching old hips and shoulders?

"Carmastic calls you 'Manedo-wea.' I want to."

"What does it mean? Something nice like your name?"

"It means 'spirit woman', an' that means 'medicine-woman' — I do not know how to say it clear. I could in my own tongue."

"I, 'medicine-woman'?" Alison spoke incredulously. "Why, it's only because I bought some salve at the shop; it is so good for his aches and pains, his rheumatism and sciatica. He suffers from those. He won't let a doctor touch him, they say."

"No. He believes in the 'medicine' of his tribe. It wasn't all that, the medicine you gave him, that helped him. It was your shell. It is the sacred

shell. Carmastic tells his grandson's wife, an' she tells me. She said, he said that by that sign he knows you. *You* can do anything for him. He says you are his mother come back to help him."

"Do you mean the shell I wore the first time we went over to the reservation, the big one I looped both ends of the sash of my sweater through — so?" She went through the motion with her hands.

"That is it. It is the sacred shell of the medicine woman. He said his mother had one like it. She was great medicine-woman."

"Manedo-wea." Alison repeated it to herself, her voice dwelling on the name. Hearing her, Kinni-kinnik showed unmistakable delight.

"You will soon speak our tongue, Manedo-wea; then you will be one of us, as Little Owl is."

"I am sure he is one of you from all you have said, Kinni-kinnik. I am so glad we have had this talk together. I shall take the memory of it with me on my journey."

"If you see him you will know I speak truth. Colin will tell you so. And Stella Plunket knows I speak truth from my heart. She loved the white man — not the boy, she did not know him. He is kind to her. She is what you call his 'care.' But he does not love her. She is nothing to him. She feels as I used to feel. We have spoken together. I tell her when she is married an' her child tugs at her breast, she will be whole as I am whole. But she cannot forget."

Alison Doane rose. She had heard enough. She was beginning to understand something of the tragedy of a woman's life through love, whether white woman, red, or half-breed. It was time to go.

"Kinni-kinnik, you are such a rich woman, rich in your children and your husband, and in all the memories of true love — I envy you."

It was the Indian woman's turn to look amazed.

"Sometime I will tell you my little story. It is about a long, long trail, and how I found it here in this north country — Be sure to meet me at the station to-morrow by ten, won't you? We will spend the day with Carmastic, and his grandson's wife and her darling little pappooses. Don't take any food with you. I'm going to have a party of my own, what we Americans call a 'surprise party', in the old man's wigwam. Good-by." She turned at the gate to wave her hand to Kinni-kinnik in the door.

The Indian woman looked puzzled; for the moment it was as if she were back again in her childhood, hearing that same clear-ringing voice calling: "Good-by."

In her sudden confusion of thought she gave no answering "good-by"; but she murmured lovingly, "Manedo-wea."

III

THE MAN

III

THE MAN

Summoned

I

Bob Collamore, or Robert Collamore as he felt privileged to sign himself after his full-fledged independence, went forth from the mountains a man-boy, indomitable of will, imbued with the symbolism and nature worship of the Indians, eager for the new, the strange, and, like most boys of his age, uncertain of purpose.

He was old for his years, this man-boy; old in mind although that mind had come in contact with no book worth reading other than the Book. He had suffered bitter hardship when he was very young. He had lived with the saddle-maker; he had lived in his lean-to — and yet not lived because of the sordid environment of the squaw's housekeeping. He was courageous, sensitive, responsive to what was fine, — his uncle's deed always in his memory, — and to the good exemplified in the saddle-maker and the Indians. His sympathies were both keen and quick. He was ready to succor man or animal. He was imitative, taking surface color from his surroundings; enthusiastic, trustful, except in a pony trade; but determined to yield to no one, to sweep whatever balked him or his will out of his path, and

set upon seeing the world as he might choose to see it. Such was the man-boy at fifteen.

2

From fifteen to thirty every man's life has its primitive needs and the essential potentialities to meet them. How they are met during this period depends on the particular make-up of the individual: his temperament, — to define it more accurately something which is in part his inheritance, — and on his environment.

Intricately interwoven with this fact of the necessary sustenance of the body, are the desires, the ambitions, varying as to time and place. These in the course of years may or may not become, according to will and circumstances, a set purpose.

These shuttles of will and circumstance ply back and forth, shifting at times, but always carrying the threads in and out of the living warp. During this process, it may be that for many years no hint of the pattern can be gained. When, however, the interwoven threads of will, circumstance, and their resulting ambitions, purposes, deeds, begin to show a design, then it is that a thinking man becomes aware, although dimly and at intervals, of a certain spiritual force controlling all these workings and weavings towards prescribed accomplishment.

Here he sees a thread of good fortune; there he finds a thrum of mischance. At times he may note the introduction of colors, some bright, others neutral; many, dark and sombre, the result of changing environment or of varying mental conditions. He finds, on scrutiny, the use of coarse threads, fine threads, smooth surfaces, rough surfaces, here and

there, it may be, a knot or two — all factors of the design he glimpses throughout the warp.

As he approaches thirty he begins to realize that somehow, in some way unknown to him, that to which his spiritual nature responds, in other words his ideal, is the force that controls his life lines. Recognizing this, his life and all other lives assume a different aspect in his eyes. His outlook broadens; his insight deepens. His recognition of life's meaning becomes fuller. His duty to his kind defines itself more sharply; it is more readily undertaken. He advances with firmer tread, clearer vision, along the path of life.

And what of the twistings and turnings, the blind out-reachings, the stumblings? What of the failure to read the trail signs, the pitfalls, the man traps? What of the seeking and not finding? The losing of the trail for a time, almost to the losing of life itself, by following its deflections too far: its trials, its hardships, its temptations?

It is best not to follow a man's way on the path of life too closely. It is not wise to scrutinize his course too minutely. Life is life, and its trail never an easy one to follow. Men are but human, or they would not be following this trail; and humankind, in its strength as in its frailty, is what it was, is, and always will be.

3

When after twenty-one years of absence from the mountains Robert Collamore revisited them, he returned to the region a boy-man.

He was unbroken physically by the hardships he endured during the establishment of himself on a living basis. The great northern wheat fields at

seed time and harvest, the dusty arid plains, the high cattle range, the forests in the south and north, desert sands, the ice and snow of the Yukon — all these places knew him and he knew them.

Hardened he was, on the surface at least, by contact with thousands of men and women in diverse walks of life; touched at times by the lure of the cities; cautiously untrustful rather than mistrustful; still wilful. His sympathies, however, were but the more quickened with the years; his readiness to succor, to relieve distress, the more spontaneous. And still at heart, and in his love for the wide spaces and lonely trails of the great Out-of-doors, he was a true Son of the Silent Places.

4

He was thinking over the many changes in the region and its people, as he rode over the rolling country that, on the Dakota side, forms the approach to the Turtle Mountains.

When he left this hill country that day in August, twenty-one years before, — looking back for a farewell wave of his hand to the hilltop where the Indians, who had accompanied him a half day's journey, sat motionless on their ponies, silhouetted black against a deep red August sunset, — he made his way eastwards into Dakota. He stopped at the first solitary farm with a big acreage of golden wheat ready for the harvest, and asked for work.

His muscles ached again in sympathy at the remembrance of the tough, back-breaking, unaccustomed labor for those weeks in which he "hired out." He thrust his hand into his trousers pocket to jingle some loose silver in its depths, and smiled at the sound. He was recalling how good those first

hard dollars, the wages for eight weeks' work from sun-up to sun-down, sounded to him when, to test their genuineness, he rang them one by one on a whetstone. Eighty-six dollars, separate silver dollars in good United States coin. He had asked to be paid in that way; and these were all his own! Never since had he felt such a suffocating joy of possession.

He was thinking of what he had seen on the way hither: farms here, farms there, houses, barns, elevators, cattle, and horses. In the distance he heard the faint shrill whistle of an engine heralding an approaching train.

As he neared the rough wooded land, the scene of his old-time haunts, he perceived this so-called Turtle Mountain region to be what in reality it is: an elevation of the plains, which themselves lie fifteen hundred feet above sea level, the "mountain" rising from two to six hundred feet above them.

He was on his way north into Manitoba; and he was going to reach it in these days of rapid travel in his own indirect way. He knew what lay on that northward stretch of partial wilderness into the region of the great Fur Company's hunters and trappers and, in the immediate future, of prospectors, and homesteaders. He knew that a few years would in all probability change the face of that northern wilderness. He wanted to see it once again before any of the familiar features should have undergone a transformation, or been obliterated by blasting, digging, or scarring through denudation of its great pulp forests by fire or the hand of man. He wanted, also, to see his Indians in that north land. They had sent for him to hold council with them, about

what he had no knowledge; but it was important, so McGillie wrote.

He knew that country northwards. He could see it in his mind's eye as he rode slowly over the old south trail by which as a boy he had entered the mountains for the first time. He saw this Turtle Mountain, this stronghold of the old-time Crees, signalling straight away to Riding Mountain; and Riding Mountain passing on that signal to Duck, and Duck to Porcupine, the intervening distance from each mountain station to the next averaging sixty to a hundred and twenty miles and all four wooded to the summits — these isolated mountain videttes for the vast plains of Saskatchewan.

He intended to see them all and very soon — only from a distance, over the low shores of the great Northern Lakes, Manitoba — the Strait of God — and Winnipegosis, the Little Sea, in contradistinction to Winnipeg, the Great Sea. But first, he must see this land of his boyhood, of Chum, and Carmastic, Kinni-kinnik and her brothers. He wanted to take news of it to all of them at the New Mission.

As he rode on farther into the mountain proper, over which runs the boundary line dividing his own land from the Canadian, he found his interest in the surroundings diminishing. He was almost on the point of wishing he had not revisited the place, so changed it was from what he had known it to be. Forest fires running wild over the mountain district had wrought havoc among the fine big timber. A dense young growth, mainly aspen, poplar, and birch, stood in its place. He saw the brulés covered knee-deep with pea vines and vetches. He noted the unwarrantable height of the tall stumps left

standing to rot, an evidence in his experienced eyes of the great waste of this precious timber in a bare prairie country.

He drew rein as he was about to pass the old "spring-trail." The oak coppice where he had played his joke on McGillie and the Indians was gone, in all probability taken for posts. He rode on to the hut.

There was little left of what was around it. The big timber at the entrance to the north trail was gone; a dense stand of aspen had taken its place. The roomy hut, for so many years the squatter's home, now open to wind and weather, had evidently been used for years by men on the trail. The elements had done their work: windowless, doorless, the roof fallen in, crushed by twenty-one winters of snows, the sills rotting — it made him homesick, this man who might in truth have said, "Whereso-ever my horse roams, there is my home."

Of the roomier shed only the ridgepole, a few rafters, and uprights remained. The boards had long since been taken by any one who could use them.

His own little lean-to of logs, the chimney de-spoiled of much stone, its plank door unhinged, its chinks open to rain and snow, still stood there as a welcome. The boards on the shed next the lean-to had been left untouched. He entered it.

Very evidently the chance passer on the trail had used it all these years to bunk in, for his bunk was still filled with a mass of blackened hay and mouldy straw. Acting on impulse he began to toss the rotting mass out of the doorway. No man coming over the trail should find so uninviting a bed in his old lean-to!

Beneath the hay and straw was a layer of canvas, the flap of a tent which some earlier cave-man had used to soften the boards or keep him warm; it, likewise, was black and rotten. He took it out. A sickening smell of must rose from the damp decay of the boards beneath. He was about to fling it out after the hay and straw, when he was aware of some paper sticking to the bottom. He shook it free of the canvas; it fell in pieces. Then he threw out the tent flap, and picking up the bits of paper examined them carefully, black, sodden, the print for the most part illegible; only here and there he could read a word. And so reading, the realization came to him, through a flashlight of memory, that this literary derelict, of nearly a quarter of a century, was a fragment of his own fragmentary Book which he had left without thought when he said good-by to the mountains.

He sat down on the sill, which in those old days had served for threshold of his door, and cautiously separated some portions of the paper that were adhering. Opening them he found two sentences of an otherwise obliterated verse fairly legible:

"*Go through . . . the gates . . . lift up a standard for the people.*"

He never remembered to have heard or seen them. There was no clue as to what book of his Book contained them, for all headlines were wanting.

Over and over Robert Collamore read those few words, and with each reading knew that, through them, the clear call had, at last, come to him. His answer was at once forthcoming; he spoke aloud:

"I am ready."

Such was his consecration.

For more than a year he had waited for the Land he so loved to "come in", to take her place in the ranks of those nations who were fighting for their lives against a superior brute force, the weaker against the stronger; waited for the opportunity to join up with his own people when they should declare for justice and humanity, and back up their words with deeds — hot shot rather than blank cartridges; waited for her to put her strong young shoulders under a breaking Old World apparently *in extremis*. Thus far, he had waited in vain.

He undertook this journey through the mountains and into Canada, with a half-defined purpose in mind to join up with the Canadian forces at the earliest moment compatible with keeping a certain business promise, made to a man two years before; that fulfilled, he would go.

He separated the few words from their stained, unreadable setting, and placed the bit of paper carefully in his pocket book. Then he mounted his horse and rode rapidly on over the north trail, where the great sycamore's stump told its own tale; along the bluff, down into the little valley, up the hill, across the clearing to the spot on which Carmastic had shown him the Path of Life. He knew now whither it led. . .

5

He rode on down by the lakes where he saw the summer campers' sites, the newly made trails; he found even a stretch of motor service — and *this* in his wilderness of twenty-one years gone! Farther and farther he rode on, all adown the rolling flanks of the mountain rich in homesteads and farms watered from those same slopes; and still onward to

Deloraine where he and his tired horse put up for the night.

The Council

I

Colin McGillie and Robert Collamore met by appointment in the wilderness of woods and waters we name Lake Manitoba, Waterhen River, Lake Winnipegosis, Mossy Portage, Cedar Lake, and their shores, inlets, and islands. It was a good joy for them both, this reliving together something of the old Turtle Mountain life of their boyhood in this northern and vaster extent of country where game and fish abound, and they could live from day to day dependent only on rod and rifle.

The weather was glorious: keen, frosty nights, ice rimming the shores, followed by halcyon days, the cold tonic air tempered with the warm sun of a mellow October. At night the camp was pitched on the shore of Manitoba, "Strait of God", a fringe of birch and aspen to shelter it; or on one of the many islands on the broad expanse of the Little Sea, Lake Winnipegosis, where a driftwood fire sent wild shadows scouting among the dark spruce tops.

Robert Collamore's desire was fulfilled: above the western shores of Manitoba and Winnipegosis, as the canoe sped northward, he saw far away across swamp and forest the "mountains" of the Saskatchewan plain and in succession — Riding, Duck, Porcupine.

During these days and nights with his friend, Colin McGillie dropped twenty years of care from his sturdy shoulders as the two talked of old times; laughed again over their fight for Kinni-kinnik; again cursed Jane's "jawin'" that still galled their

saddle-maker in his matrimonial harness. They spoke of his goodness to them, his love for them, but, being undemonstrative men, said nothing of their love for him which could not change. Then, as earnest men putting aside childish things, they talked of the war, and Collamore spoke of his decision.

McGillie made no reply; he was taking it all in slowly. Bob knew he would hear from him on the subject sometime when his slow-working mind should be geared to this fact.

With a feeler out for the nightly lowering temperature and an eye to the rapidly making ice, which the rays of the southward-racing sun failed to melt, they made their way back to a station near Winnipegosis. Here Colin took train for Groundhouse. He carried with him a promise from Bob that he would see him again within two weeks for the council at the reservation there.

Collamore went on to Winnipeg where forwarded mail was awaiting him. It was here he found the letters and telegrams from the company whose advice Mr. Carrolly was anticipating, in the hope it might clear the muddled prospect for the setting up of the new mills within the next six months.

2

It was a council of Crees, for the one white man, Little Owl, had grown up among them, speaking their language, learning their ways, sometimes thinking their thoughts, writing letters for them in their efforts to retain their old home in the mountains, efforts that were brought to naught because of the inexorable march of progress. They counted him as one of themselves. McGillie was, of course, part

Cree. All invited to the council were friends and brothers.

When Collamore and McGillie reached the reservation, they found the Indians assembled and waiting for them. It was a heartening welcome they gave to Robert Collamore, whom they had not seen for ten years, and a genuine one.

They went at once to their medicine-man's wigwam. It was large, covered with skins to protect it from the cold. Beside it stood Chum's house, a rambling affair of logs, boards, shingles, and bark, which Carmastic could not be induced to occupy. He was of the "old order." A light snow covered the ground. Smoke was ascending from the opening at the top of the tepee, rising straight upwards in the still air. A good fire was in progress as the men entered.

They found Carmastic, in a new blanket, seated before it, tending it with little sticks he had cut for this special occasion. He was feeble, worn with the years; but he lifted his hand with a quick movement towards Collamore as he entered.

"How, Little Owl." His voice was still resonant.

"How, Carmastic!" The two clasped hands.

The few words of greeting took Collamore back over memory's long trail to their first meeting in the clearing. Carmastic's second act brought a smile to his face. He knew he must not laugh, for the occasion was evidently too solemn although he had no idea of its import; that was for Carmastic to reveal. The old Indian handed him the famous peace pipe which they had smoked together when the reconciliation concerning the pony took place — more than twenty years ago.

The Indians seated themselves around the fire; some few, however, were standing, and all crowding the wigwam to its capacity. Collamore sat between Carmastic and Chum, his boyhood intimate; McGillie opposite with Kinni-kinnik's brothers.

For a while they smoked in silence, the pipe passing from one to the other. Then the famous pipe was laid aside, and Carmastic, wrapping his new blanket closely about him, folded his arms, hugging himself as if cold, and spoke to them. His voice was still strong, but his teeth were gone and the lack of them interfered at times with his speech. Now and then he hesitated as if to make sure of his words.

"My children, we have smoked the peace pipe; but only as a memory of peace. I am told there is no more peace on this earth. In my old age I have had a vision. I have looked into the future years as we raise the flap of the wigwam on a strange trail, to peer in through smoke of fire with dim eyes. What I saw I tell to you; then we will hold council, for the vision leads to the warpath."

The Indians stirred slightly. The old way of their fathers and fathers' fathers was beginning to lay its spell upon them through the old man's solemnity of speech.

"I saw, in the night, fire on Porcupine Mountain. A spark from the fire, passing through the night, caught on Duck. I saw the two fires on the two mountains. The sparks from Duck carried a fire-trail to the south, to Riding Mountain, to Turtle Mountain; they flamed like dry pine trees burning in the night. I saw the four fires on the four mountains."

He was silent for a few minutes.

"They were four torches that signalled west, east, and south, to all the mountains of the tribes, Assiniboine, Blackfoot, Arapaho, Sioux — you know them all, and their mountains.

"I saw the fire-trail of these sparks sweeping over these mountains. All the land to the south was reddened with the light, as the sky grows bright with the dancing fires in the north. But no spark caught on the mountains; with the passing of the fire-trail that land to the south grew dark again.

"My children, the vision was a war vision. We hold council to find its meaning."

He took the pipe, smoked in silence and passed it to the others. When it had gone the rounds, Kinnikinnik's father, the tribal orator, spoke with eloquence:

"You say well, Carmastic, there is no peace on earth. There is only war. The four fires on the four mountains are the signs of the four English peoples dwelling in their lands — Canada, the Mother-island across the great water, the Mother-island's children-islands far distant in other waters. The great English tribes are following the world war-path that is reddened with the blood of many races of earth children.

"From the four mountains, the spark-trails, that sweep southward to the mountains of the tribes of our former enemies, are the messages from the great English tribes to their white brothers over the border to come and help them against their enemies. But the great land to the south lies in darkness. No fire catches on her mountains, her plains, in her huts, her tepees, her great council lodges; nor along the banks of the Father of Waters, nor on the shores of her big waters east, west, south.

"The great land is dark. Its peoples do not see the spark-trails, and the English tribes fight in vain; their enemy is too strong; he is too many." He turned suddenly to Robert Collamore.

"Why do not your people fight, Little Owl? Why do they close their eyes that they may not see the fire-trails flame in the sky? Why do your white men let other white men fight for their brothers? Why do your people sit in safety around their home fires, eating, drinking, singing, instead of taking the warpath to avenge the murder of their brothers' women and children — their squaws, their babes, their old mothers who are starving in the harvest time? Answer for your people, Little Owl. Tell us why your land is dark, why no fire catches."

Robert Collamore's head was bowed in shame, in humiliation. What could he say? How could he bear this thing: the hearing of such truths from the lips of red men; from a race that for generations in his own land had suffered, in part, what white men were now suffering at the hands of enemies of their own blood; a race that had struggled desperately, fought as savages, savagely, to avenge itself on the white race that had repeatedly wronged it? What could he say?

He knew he must reply; custom demanded it. He knew he must speak the truth as he saw it; nothing but the truth in the presence of these men of another race — his red brothers since his childhood.

He addressed Carmastic, looking him squarely in the face.

"You speak truth, Carmastic; my land is dark. It has no vision. It sees no fire-trails in the night. Its people sit at home, warmed and fed, seeing only

their own home fires while abroad in the earth stalks the wide-mouthed hunger-wolf, and the beasts of prey, murder, rapine — and worse — prowl among the ruins of the white men's homes. Little children lifting up their voices on the highway, crying for bread, are perishing in their hunger; the child-bearing women are dying for want of care and nourishment." He turned to the Indians.

"My red brothers, you know what I say is true, for your fathers have gone through the same torment that your white brothers are now enduring.

"And my own land is yet dark. It has no vision, not yet. Your vision is a true vision, Carmastic; but your eyes are dimmed, looking through the smoke of the white man's torment at the stake. You could not trace each spark as the fire-trails swept onward into the night. Your sight was too old to follow them. But I know that sparks have fallen from the fire-trail, a spark here, a spark there; and the fire has caught — a little fire as yet, a small running underbrush fire that does not show on the mountain for all to see. The sparks have caught in the hearts of men, and set them aflame. These men will take the warpath to avenge their white brothers of the English and other tribes. You will live to see the truth of my words."

"Name the other tribes to us, Little Owl. I have heard, but I cannot remember," said the medicine-man.

"Belgian, French, Russian, Italian, the black men from the deserts, Indians from the south seas, and wild fighters, neither black nor white, from the great plains over the big water."

"Mgh."

It was the first articulate sign of approval that the Indians had given. Hearing it, the spirit moved McGillie to slow deliberate speech.

"I and my blood-brother have been for three weeks on the long trail. We spoke much together of the great war. He told me that he was bringing to Carmastic a message from Assiniboine, Blackfoot, Sioux, Chippewa, Arapaho, and many others. They said they were ready to fight for the white men across the big water if the chiefs in the great council lodge at Washington would let them go. He told me they wanted to fight the great enemy across the big water because he was doing by the white men as once the white men did by their fathers and themselves. They say they want to fight for the white men because another white man and his powerful tribe are wasting the white men's lands and killing off their tribes. They say they will fight because, if that Great Enemy Chief and his tribes are too strong for their white brothers, no Indian will ever gain his freedom. They say they will fight to the death to keep their children and children's children free from the Great Enemy Chief's bondage — fight for the white men's freedom and by winning freedom for them, they may help to win their own." He paused a moment.

"I go to fight with them, shoulder to shoulder, whether Assiniboine, Sioux, Blackfeet, your old enemies, or with the men of the other white tribes — or with the Crees, my own people."

The Indians were stirred again by McGillie's words. They gave no sign but their syllable of approval. It was, however, unanimous, unmistakable.

"And my blood-brother, Bob-Little Owl, goes with me. He has told me this."

There was another stir among the red men. The situation was growing tense. Even old Carmastic's sharp, wrinkled face took on the eagle look of his youth.

Then out of his suppressed excitement Chum spoke impetuously:

"I trap, I hunt, I fish, I shoot, I scout and leave no mark on the trail that an enemy could find. I can run with the big runners that run for money.

"Now I go to trap, hunt, bait, scout, shoot the beasts of prey — the men of that Big Enemy Chief's tribe that murder little children, that starve child-bearing women, that burn the huts and lay waste the cornfields that the hunger-wolf may prowl throughout the land. McGillie has told me.

"I will fight side by side with McGillie and Little Owl, my 'brother-friend' who calls me 'Chum.' I will take the warpath with white men. I go to fight the white men's fight — for the men who keep peace here in our land; who will not let my squaw and pappooses starve; who will protect them from all harm while I cross the big water to fight for the tribes, that the enemy tribes may not be too strong for them. I have said."

A deep murmur filled the wigwam, increasing to a prolonged "Mgh" as Kinni-kinnik's two brothers, one after the other, joined themselves to the Great Cause and gave their reasons for so doing. After them, one by one, the sparks caught in the hearts of the younger men and set them aflame to follow the warpath with the English and the other tribes.

Carmastic spoke the last word:

"I was glad in the days of my youth because I was strong. When an enemy had fallen I was proud of the scalp at my belt. I was glad when I returned from the warpath to my tepee, and my women, seeing me afar off, sang songs of triumph at my coming. Then I feasted. I sang the song of my medicine that all might hear. I danced to the sound of the drum.

"To-day, in my old age, when my eyes are dim and my hand is like a quivering aspen leaf, when my strength is the strength of a babe, when my food is the food of babes, and the meat for strong men is no longer for me because I can no longer chew it to nourish me, I rejoice as I rejoiced in the days of my youth. My strength is renewed in my children's children, and the children's children of my tribe. Through them my feet follow the warpath as of old. Through their eyes I see again the day of triumph. With them I shall sing the scalp song of victory. Through them and their deeds I shall live and never die — only sleep; for my medicine will live on in them, as they fight side by side with white men. I speak a great mystery.

"I saw no spark fall on Turtle Mountain, — Little Owl says truly: my eyes are too dim, — but the spark has fallen. The fire is kindled in the hearts of our Son of the Silent Places and his red brothers.

"The meaning of the vision is clear. The four fires on the four mountains are four torches burning in the night of war darkness for all peoples of earth to see. The sparks from their fire-trails shall be carried by the great winds over all the earth, to catch in the hearts of men of all the earth tribes till they burn to follow the warpath to victory."

He ceased, almost exhausted with the fervor of his words. Bob Collamore stayed him with his strong right arm. . . .

The Indians left to feast in Chum's hut where his squaw had prepared for the occasion duck soup and a sturgeon pot.

3

McGillie and Collamore remained with the old Indian. They made a bowl of tea from a five-pound package Bob had brought with him as a gift. They soaked the hard biscuit in it and fed him. They nourished him with a soft cake Kinni-kinnik had made, of which he was inordinately fond. When he was strengthened, they chatted together, all three smoking and taking their ease.

It was then Bob brought forth from his duffle bag his special presents for the old man: of tobacco a winter's store; of sweets, gumdrops and marshmallows, two pounds; of a pair of warm woolen leggings fringed along their entire length, of woolen stockings, one of his own warm vests and sack coats, and last a blanket of many colors, thick and warm.

The old Indian was delighted and expressed his delight in no uncertain terms.

"You see this new blanket?" he said, pointing to the thick, gray, red-striped, woolen square.

"I noticed it the first thing. Somebody has been ahead of me, eh?"

Carmastic nodded mysteriously. He stroked the soft woolen fleece.

"Yes, the medicine-woman gave it to me."

"Didn't know as you had one here, Carmastic. Who is she? Do you know, McGillie?"

"Kinni-kinnik knows her; she has done nothing but talk about her since I got back."

"She came to me one day before the snow fell; came to the door of my tepee with a message from your saddle-maker."

"What, Bill Plunket! How could she know him?"

"She knew him. She had visited with him. She brought me the message. He does not forget me or the Turtle Mountains. He sent me this skin pouch to keep my tobacco in." He drew it forth from the folds of his blanket and held it up for the two men to admire. "You see this little yellow ornament of gold —"

"That's brass, Carmastic," said Bob, smiling.

"Brass or gold, it is all one to me; the ornament is what I treasure. Look well. There is a loon wrought on it — a flying loon."

Bob and McGillie examined it; it was even as the old Indian said.

"He sent it to me because of my sister, and because of my Son of the Silent Places who marked the way of the loon across the lake, hearing her call. When he was a boy, and had not then made his fast in the treetop, he hammered it out of an old piece of kettle the saddle-maker bought from one of my tribe. He sent me word it was the best piece of work the boy had done. He treasured it; even as I treasure it for his sake, for the sake of Flying Loon, my sister, for the sake of my little white friend of the Turtle Mountains." He smiled serenely.

Hearing those words, seeing that bit of hammered brass, Robert Collamore relived in one second the experiences of that day when he and the saddle-maker, and afterwards the old medicine-man, talked

together of dreams, that came from fasting, and their "medicine."

He made no reply to the old man, for he was thinking hard. The trail had been a long one. He had sought his "medicine" along all its length, all its twists and turns, north, south, east, west. He had never found it save in his dream in the treetop. And now there was little chance to find it in reality, not since his recent decision. Well, the reality outweighed all that other — in a way. It would in all likelihood remain an ideal.

Then the old man, in rambling speech, — it was as if the great effort at the council had exhausted the vital spring, — went back to his childhood, to his mother, the medicine-woman, dwelling in a past of which the two men knew nothing, into which they could not enter even if they had cared to.

They took leave of him shortly after, Collamore promising to see him again if possible on his return from North Lake whither, he told him, he was going on business. The two men walked back to the railroad station and separated there.

"Keep me posted, Bob. When you go, I go too; and I know the Injuns will wait to go with us."

"I'll let you know as soon as I know myself. I've got to help, up north, in the pulp wood belt they are opening up. This war is taking experts in this line pretty fast, and it's part of my duty to help out here first. It may take me a few weeks, possibly two months. Anyway, I intend to be in Val Cartier by the first of February; that will get me across in early summer."

"The Indians will go to a man," said McGillie, as they parted.

"I'll bet that wigwam of Carmastic's is the first recruiting booth in the 'bush'; what do you say, McGillie?"

McGillie waited a minute to take in the full sense of what Collamore was saying. Then he laughed.

"You're 'bout right, Bob. But it took our old medicine-man to give 'em the stuff, didn't it?"

"He's bully," said Bob.

McGillie went his way, smiling to himself.

The Old Lake Post

I

Alison Doane always spoke of the few days spent as guest at the Fur Company's ancient trading post as her "apocalyptic" week. The surroundings seemed to her unreal, the old house itself an unsubstantial vision of a vanished life.

It was a week of bright sunny days and deep blue skies, of long nights of a strange beauty. The moon was nearing the full. Its light flooded the frozen surface of the lake and the snow-covered ground, until the trees showed as black blotches on a field of white.

Of the life and movement, vocal and full of color, that her mother had described to her, she saw nothing. Of the brigades of canoes, the voyageurs in gay capote and sash, and their campfires, there was nothing in evidence. It needed the coming of spring to open the frozen gates to the hinterland; it needed the setting back of time to the middle of the nineteenth century, in order to visualize even a small part of the flood tide of that wilderness life, so full of gayety and charm — as well as of untold hardship — which used to flow back and forth along the great water highways of the North.

But, from the natural surroundings of the place and its marked scenic setting, she could well imagine what that life must have been in those days when her mother, in her young girlhood, moved lightly about in the old house, singing the "chansonnettes" of the voyageurs — songs which she herself could sing even now after the lapse of years. She pictured her dancing for the pleasure of her host and hostess, and a chance guest or two from far away England or Scotland, the same Highland Fling that her daughter danced, years afterwards, in a bark-covered hut among the towering pines of a forest in northern Minnesota.

2

It was the afternoon of the sixth day of her visit. She was expecting the arrival of her cousins and their outfit at any hour, for word was brought to them the day before, by some teamsters on their way up the lake, that the party was a day behind them.

In honor of Evelyn's coming she dressed herself in some of her "Winnipeg toggery", as Mr. Carrolly called the two women's numerous purchases in that city: a thick white serge dress skirt, a closely-fitting white sweater, over which she put on a Canadian blanket capote, all white, of which she had been enamoured and lured into undue extravagance. She drew the hood over her head, when her host said the teams were sighted, and throwing around her neck a long crimson muffler of knitted silk to relieve the effect of dead whiteness, ran out to meet them.

The long train of dog teams, the sound of sleigh bells, and Phil Carrolly's college yell as he caught

sight of her, brought to Alison Doane a sense of life, of reality, that she had lost during her short visit at the Old Post; brought, also, a realization of her own special day and place in this adventuresome twentieth century.

With Evelyn's hug, not a simulacrum this time, she was back in the world of her own generation, not her mother's.

"I was never so glad to see any one in all my life, Alison Doane, never! It has been perfectly forlorn without you; even Phil was getting blue — and, oh, my dear, I've so much to tell you."

She turned to her hostess with effusive greeting, delighted to be again with those she called "real people", so she said. The two went into the house, Evelyn declaring she was stiff from long sitting and nearly frozen.

Alison stood in the doorway ready to welcome Phil Carrolly who, after a few hearty words with his host, came towards her swinging his cap. He greeted her right cousinly with a hearty smack on each cheek.

"I say, Alison, the sight of you after these twenty-five miles of ice and snow would cure snow-blindness. What's this?" he went on, standing her off, his hand on her shoulder, at arm's length to admire her novel costume. "Did you get this in Winnipeg? You look as if you had been renewing your youth. I remember you looked just as you do now when I used to take you to the skating rink with Evelyn — and you only seventeen."

Before she could reply to his half-and-half flattery he turned to a man who was just leaving his cariole.

"Mr. Collamore, this is our cousin, Miss Doane,

of whom you have heard quite enough from my wife these last few days. Evelyn will tell you all about this gentleman, Alison," he added, mischief in his voice, and turned again to his host.

For a moment the stranger and Alison were alone. She extended her hand right cordially to him, for she felt so out-going to every one at that moment with all her little world about her after her few days at the old trading post.

"Perhaps there is no need to welcome you to the Old Lake Post; you may know it, Mr. —," she looked at him inquiringly, "— I did not quite catch your name, Phil was so indefinite."

Whether he ignored her outstretched hand, or forgot to take it, or perhaps did not see it, Alison at the moment she offered it so frankly could not know. But she noticed a certain hesitation in his manner and speech.

"Collamore — Robert Collamore, at your service," Then for the space of a second he held her hand in a firm clasp.

Hearing this name, Alison Doane suddenly realized that a *fact* stood in the flesh here before her; and realizing it she was glad, so glad. She knew she was seeing again before her the "boy" she had been seeking. This stranger could be none other than the saddle-maker's "Son" and McGillie's friend — for Kinni-kinnik's words and the postcard assured her of his identity — whom she had never forgotten and always remembered with pity. He was the boy whom in thought she called her "little half-breed." Knowing this, her face showed her gladness — and she did not care if it did.

To the man, looking steadily and unemotionally

into that face, it showed a radiance born of a joy in something of which he was in utter ignorance — the joy at the discovery of himself.

Nor was she surprised, as she would have been with any other man, when, rather abruptly and with some slight excuse, he turned again to her host and then gave an order to the half-breed who was with his dog team. It was one of the satisfying things of life, this discovery. All else did not matter with her.

"He's a queer chap," she said to herself as, throwing off her capote, she went to find Evelyn; "and that's the very thing I said to father twenty-two years ago; persistence of type in this case, and no mistake."

She was smiling when she entered the big gathering room, and found Evelyn warming her knees and toasting her feet before the huge stove while drinking the hot tea her hostess had at once provided; her young daughter, at home from Montreal for the holiday month, was serving it prettily.

It was no time or place for any exchange between the two women of experiences during the last seven days of their separation. The three men came in and the conversation was, of course, general. They were obliged to wait until they went to their rooms, two hours before dinner, leaving Mr. Carrolly, their host, and Collamore smoking and chatting together.

3

So soon as the door closed upon them, the flood of Evelyn's information broke loose, but not before Alison had asked her question:

"Do tell me, Evelyn, about this Mr. Collamore? Who is he? The expected expert?"

Evelyn divested herself of her manifold wraps, talking meanwhile. She took out a warm kimono from what she was pleased to call her "duffle bag", put it on and threw herself on the bed.

"There, now, we can talk; I'm positively starved for a chat with you. Yes, he's *the* new expert, and Phil is as pleased as a boy with his first motorcycle. It's been just one streak of luck for Phil this time, and, of course, I am correspondingly happy. Don't you think he's handsome?"

"Now, Evelyn, I won't gratify you till I've had a good look at him. Tell me first who he is, and where he comes from, and how long he is going to stay at the North Lake — and all there is to tell."

"Seems to me you are mightily interested all of a sudden. It's not your way to enthuse over strangers, my dear."

"Goodness, Evelyn, if you had been here nearly a week and feeling as if you were out of the world, you'd be the first one to show an interest in one I should call an interesting man — from his looks. He's so different from others."

"You're quite right, Alie." Evelyn nodded approval, turning over to face her cousin, her cheek in her palm. "He *is* interesting, and I don't blame you for getting up a decided interest in him. It has taken seven days of absolute isolation to make you get up a genuine interest in the first stranger you come across. I only wish I could have known of this recipe some years ago."

"Don't be so absurd, Evelyn. But just get down to solid facts, and tell me something."

Evelyn thought hard for a moment. "Why, you see, Alie, there doesn't seem to be very much to tell,

after all. Of course, he's charming, and *very* entertaining; but come to think it over he hasn't said so very much about himself. He seemed a little preoccupied most of the time. But Phil says his services are absolutely incalculable at just this juncture."

"Doesn't Phil know how long he is going to stay?"

"Not exactly. He's going up with us to-morrow and says he may stay a few weeks or a few days. That's all we know. Of course, Phil isn't going to press him in any way, for he doesn't want to take any risk of losing him. He's too thankful to get him. I suppose you can stand it up there for two weeks or so, can't you?"

"I can stand it indefinitely after this experience, Evelyn." She spoke gravely.

"What's been the matter, Alie? I knew there was something or you wouldn't have looked, when I saw you, as if we had come straight from paradise to visit you and take you back with us."

Alison smiled; sometimes it was best to be wholly frank with her cousin. Evelyn always appreciated that. So now she spoke out from her heart.

"Well, I don't mind telling you, dear, but I'm afraid it is what you might call the destruction of an ideal. You see, I have wanted all my life to visit this old place where mother was a girl and had such good times — and so I came, hoping to relive something of what she told me she had enjoyed here a half a century ago. You see, I forgot my own age in wanting to realize this dream of mine. I've lived in part on ideals all my life, and, somehow, the whole thing has in a way depressed me; and I'm so awfully glad you've come. They have been kindness itself to me here; but it's what the French call 'morne':

these gloomy cedars, this graveyard of an old, old house with the spirit of its old life gone from it. I belong to To-day—and then there is this awful war; it weighs on me."

"Of course you do, you dear old thing. I know just how you must have felt: as if you'd walked back into another century and shut the door tight on yourself. And as for the war, of course that's always with us. I've just finished my tenth pair of stockings."

"That's just the way I felt. And now I am beginning to feel as if I could breathe again. I can't wait for to-morrow and the beginning of our trip north."

"Well, if we live to get there we'll be lucky. And what's ahead of us I don't know —"

"And I don't care so long as it isn't like this."

"Of course you don't; and it won't be like this. It couldn't be because we're going into a totally unsettled wilderness, except for a few fishermen and loggers, so our half-breeds tell us, and everything new, nothing old."

"Oh," she drew a long breath, "I'm so relieved just thinking of the newness."

Evelyn Carrolly bounded up on the bed. "I believe you were actually homesick for that Reservation, Alison Doane."

"I believe I was." Alison spoke meekly.

"Well, my dear, all I can say is tastes differ. Now, look here," she said, switching to a new idea of her own, "let's make a jolly evening for the men and our lovely hostess. You needn't tell me they wouldn't enjoy livening up a little. *We'll* show them we're not going to take any color from our surroundings. And there is that perfectly lovely young

girl — I know she will be thankful. What do you say to it?"

"I'm with you heart and soul —"

"You always were one-half angel, if you are queer at times, Alison Doane. What are you going to wear?"

Alison's laugh rang out at that, and Phil Carrolly, coming down the corridor, heard it and without preliminary rap poked his head in at the door.

"What's up, girls?"

"Oh, just clothes and a bit of fun, Phil," said Alison, answering for both. "Evelyn is going to dress, regularly dress, for dinner. But this is the best I have here."

"You know well enough, Alison Doane, white is the most becoming thing you can wear. And if you'll put that muffler round your waist for a sash, you need not be better dressed. I'm going to wear my pale blue chiffon —"

"Evelyn!" Alison made emphatic protest.

"I am; I'm not going to dress according to surroundings, would you, Phil?"

"Not if I know myself." He spoke decidedly. "Say, girls, I'd rather be at the Mission than here — it's getting on my nerves." Both women laughed. "How have you stood it, Alie?"

"I had to, till you and Evelyn came; but I know just what you mean."

"Had enough of it, eh?"

"More than enough; but it's only the place. These people here have been hospitality itself."

"They're a fine lot. We must return this somehow, Eve, when they get as far south as New York."

"Of course we will. Now I must dress. And you needn't look at me like that, Phil, for I'm going to put on that little ermine cape over the chiffon; so I'm safe if it drops to ten below in the dining room and we have ices for dessert." This incongruous statement, defiant of all unity of time and place, brought a laugh from the other two.

4

It was, in truth, a merry evening. Evelyn's unadulterated gayety, the gayety of a care-free woman to whom life has been very kind, proved infectious, and Alison's secret joy in her discovery lent a double charm to all she said and did. She sang for them the "chansons" of the voyageurs — the songs that so many times, with the coming of the canoe brigades, had floated over the waters of the lake to the ears of generations of dwellers at the Old Post.

The young daughter of the house played the simple accompaniments to "A la claire fontaine" — (Unto the fountain clear); "The Adventurous Crow", known to her mother, and played by Antoine on that never to be forgotten night in the forest hut; and the familiar "Behind the manor there is a pond", with its famous chorus, "Rouli, roulant, ma boule roulant", in which they all joined.

Their host, his Scot's heart warming slowly but very surely to the mood of such joyous and welcome guests, brought out at last a set of rather antiquated bagpipes on which, years before in his native town in the Highlands, he had been proficient. With the jests of his wife and daughter and the gratulatory remarks of his guests sounding in his ears, he tried his hands and lungs on them again, and with no small success. The merry reels and jolly jigs set their feet

in rhythmic movement, Alison dancing with the young daughter, Collamore with Evelyn Carrolly, and her husband with his host's rather stately spouse.

When they were all half breathless with exercise and laughter, Alison begged her host to play them something with the real *skirl* of the bagpipes in it, adding that her mother had told her she once heard them at the Old Post. Then there rang through the big room, all too small for such volume of sound, the wild half-chanting moan and wail of the "Pibroch of Donald Dhu."

"So many of our brave Highland lads and our Canadian boys, too, are hearing the bagpipes nowadays in such different circumstances, I think I never want to hear the pibroch again, father," their hostess said to her husband when he finished.

Even as she spoke, the thought of the war crowded to the fore in the consciousness of all present — all they had heard of its turmoil, its horror, its unrest, its discords; but without the thought of its redeeming harmonies — the joy of service, the braving of death in duty, the rejoicing in victory. Alison spoke impetuously:

"I ought not to have asked for the pibroch; I did not think at the time."

To which her host made answer promptly and emphatically:

"I am glad you did not think of it, Miss Doane. We, here, would give much not to think so continually of it as we do. How can we expect you to feel with us who watch the coming of every mail, even to this distant post, with dread and cold hands — for we do not know 'who next' among our boys. You are happily free from all this as yet."

Whether there was any intentional challenge in the word "happily" his guests could not know; but Robert Collamore interpreted it as such and, accepting it, spoke in answer, abruptly, almost harshly:

"'Happily'? I don't know about that."

His host looked at him in some surprise. "Then you feel perhaps as we do?"

"Yes, I feel strongly on that point; it's a sore one with me."

That was all he said at the moment, for the ladies were saying good-night. It was early to bed, for on the morrow it was a start at dawn into the wilderness still farther north. But when he was alone with his host Collamore freed his mind, and the two men sat discussing the gravity of the situation until midnight.

5

When Alison Doane laid her head on her pillow it was not to sleep at once, but to compare the two evenings which, throughout her life, had given her the most intense enjoyment. The first with its gay, gentle music, product of Antoine's clarionet, followed by the impassioned strains of the Czardas from the Hungarian boy's violin, while the wind raged and the wet snow was dashed against the window panes. The second, this of to-night with the foreign *skirl* of the bagpipes, suggestive of tumult and mourning. Yet without there was no hint of storm, only an intense stillness in the air, on the land, over the ice-bound waters. Interwoven with the experiences of both nights was the presence of the boy, "Little Owl", now a man in whom she could never have recognized the lad of white set face, drawn with grief for the loss of his dog.

Had it not been for Kinni-kinnik's conclusive evi-

dence, she would not have been sure that all this experience was not a dream.

6

At midnight, Robert Collamore, knowing that there was no sleep for him until he should have threshed out matters with himself, went out into the white night and its cold silences where alone he could hold communion with his own soul.

He walked rapidly; he knew the ground; he had been here before.

He felt most at home in this night stillness, for he was born in the "silent places" of the great plains; brought up in the wooded quiet of the Turtle Mountain wilderness. Ever since then, during his journeyings to and fro in his own land and the lands to the south and north, he had found the great silences of the solemn-shadowed desert, or the wintry solitude of the forested North-land, his best breeding places for decisive thought upon which swift action must follow.

Without stopping in his walk he held commune with himself, not silent but vocal; for he spoke aloud with and to himself — a habit acquired years ago when he was alone for weeks on the range, or in the "bush", or "cruising" in extensive tracts of virgin forest.

"It's the end of the trail, and you know it," he said. "Now hold your head up like a man, Bob Collamore, and look the thing squarely in the face.

"She is *the* woman — and you know it. Don't flinch at the truth. How you know it is a matter of no importance. You know it; and you knew it with the first look into her face, didn't you? You knew your hour had struck — at last. You acknowledge of your own free will this to be an incontrovertible and unchangeable *fact*, do you?

"You do. Very well. Let's look at the facets of this fact; you'll find there are many:

"First, this woman belongs to you, doesn't she?

"Now and always; for this world and the world to come, if there be one.

"Why she belongs to you, you can't say — and anyway, that's neither here nor there — you only know she does. But *she* doesn't know it; and you are the only one to make her realize this, doubtless to her, mighty queer fact. This, Bob, is a matter of time, and your time is limited before you go.

"For you're going, you know; this is a dead sure thing. You've kind o' consecrated yourself.

"Yet you love this woman — and you don't intend that this love of yours for her shall conflict in any way with your duty, boy, do you?

"Not on your life.

"That's all right — but how about *her?*"

His breath grew short for a moment.

"Get your wind, Bob, and at it again: How about her? How about the woman? Let's turn the fact around and look at another facet:

"What right have you, with every God-given force in you to try to make her love you as you love her, and then leave her —

"My God, if she should come to love me — love *me!*

"You know your duty; your consecration will permit no dallying with love. You know this, don't you?

"Yes, of course you know it —

"You know you will leave her, loving you, to face life perhaps alone, unprotected, unsatisfied with your presence —

"I know all that, but —

"But what? Are you going to sacrifice the woman?

"'Get thee behind me, Satan'!" He almost shouted it into the night. "You're a mean low-down soul, Bob Collamore, if you can't trust this woman you love with your very soul to love you in the same way, so that, distance or no distance, life apart or life together, in death or in life, your love for her and hers for you will know no change; for if it could know change, why — she wouldn't be *the* woman, don't you see?

"You doubting cuss, you're no man, or worthy of the name, if you harbor that devil-thought, suggested to you in your weakest hour, for a second time."

7

He shook himself, as if to rid himself of the hated presence of an untrustful thought towards this woman to whom he had given himself; then turned in his steps and walked rapidly back towards the house.

"I *will* win out. I'd kick myself for a double-dyed coward if I went into the fight over there with such distrust of the outcome. I don't know the word 'fail.' This woman's love is for me and me alone.

"Haven't waited till I am thirty-five to lie down on the trail with the end in sight. I've thought the end would never come — and now I know there will be home and love, and cool water for my thirst, and a gentle hand for my aching head; and my soul shall sit in the silences with her, the woman I love, the only one whom my Maker has made to share them with me.

"Now make tracks to the house. Get some sleep. Show to her clear eyes and a smile in the morning. You've acted like a bumptious fool ever since you met

her ten hours ago. Ten hours? Humph, what do you know about it — rather, ten thousand years. But be cautious, Son, she is not the kind to be snared; she's got to come of her own accord — for a man to be sure."

The North Lake

I

On the morrow the dawn was long in breaking into low sunshine. The cold was not severe and the weather perfect. It was primitive travelling — a large body sledge, and the three dog teams. But the sleigh held all the comforts, as to rugs and wraps, for keeping its occupants warm, besides many packages that contained certain luxuries provided by Evelyn to make life what she called "endurable" for a few days in the wilderness.

Some vacant fishers' huts afforded them shelter, such as it was, for their two nights on the way. But it was all work and no play, this getting a two days' journey northward of Groundhouse, and much sociability was out of the question. The one aim in view for all the outfit was to "get there" before being overtaken by a storm.

Alison saw little of the "boy." Once Collamore asked her if she would like to try his cariole and dogs by way of experiment. Her joyful acceptance was reward for what he termed his temerity in suggesting it. He took his place with the Carrollys in the sleigh, Evelyn positively refusing, although urged by her husband, to make any experiments on ice. And once at daybreak in a fisher's hut, when Alison proposed to fry bacon and make coffee for her party, Collamore swept her aside with gentle force and took possession of food and utensils, saying:

"No women, Carrolly, know how to cook bacon, — they fry it, men broil it, — nor to make what you might call life-saving coffee. But I yield the palm to you, Mrs. Carrolly, on the tea," and proceeded to broil the succulent strips of fat over a red-hot fire, and make coffee after the most approved recipe of the "bush."

2

Thirty-five miles on the last day was the record to the credit of tired horses and dogs when, at ten o'clock, they sighted the light in the window of the foreman's hut on a bluff overlooking the North Lake. The light was fading in the west and the rising moon at full. Frozen lakes, snow-covered portages, sparkling in the clear sunlight, silvered in the moonlight — these had been their winter highway, the only one for man and beast, into the great northern wilderness.

Mr. Dunstanes, the foreman at the plant, and his young wife were on the lookout for them, and the welcome they and their hut gave them was a thing to remember.

The hut was large, strongly built, with an ample loft. One end Mrs. Dunstanes had partitioned off by hanging some pretty cretonne on a pole for curtains; behind them was her bedroom which she gave to her two women guests. Seeing this arrangement, all the old joy of that night in the Minnesota forest came back to Alison Doane. Her joy was so genuine, so evident to all present, that Mrs. Carrolly took occasion to whisper to her husband, after climbing the ladder to the loft to see the accommodations for the three men, their host and his two guests:

"What do you suppose ails Alison, Phil? She has

looked like this, about seventeen, ever since we struck Groundhouse and this forsaken land; in fact, she came back from that trip to those Minnesota lands with something in her face I fail to understand."

"Perhaps she is reconsidering what you told me about the man and his proposal. I've often wondered if Alison were bluffing you there. Ten to one she's engaged to him. But even if she is, and she keeps on looking like this, she will prove dangerous for Collamore or any other man who has eyes in his head."

"Nonsense, Phil Carrolly," said Evelyn a bit tartly, — it really was not necessary for Phil to praise Alison in such terms, — "I know Alison Doane better than you do. No man ever knows a woman as another woman does. Alison is living with her ideals, so she calls them. She is going back to her youth and living again in imagination that good time she had with Uncle Elton just before he died."

"Poor girl, I'm glad she had it. Well, let her have all the pleasure she can get out of it. She's had a hard row to hoe in her life — "

Mrs. Carrolly interrupted him.

"You know perfectly well it's her own fault. My home was open to her from the first."

"— And she is young yet. Collamore can't be as old as she is, from the little he has said."

"You don't know whether he is married or not; you told me so. You'd better wait till you find that out, my dear."

"I leave that for you. You generally know within twenty-four hours whether there is a possible matrimonial hitch-up in sight for a man and woman, if they only happen to exchange remarks about the weather."

"Don't be sarcastic, Phil; it isn't becoming to you,

not in this climate. But I think you might sound the gentleman on the subject —"

"What for? About Alie?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean —"

"Well, I did sound him, if that is any satisfaction to you; but he gave me no bearings — probably said to himself, 'None of your darned business.' Come, let's go down. The Dunstanes have planned this well for such a crowd, but we mustn't trespass on their hospitality too long. We'll get away just as soon as we can. I take it from what Collamore said he would go back with us —"

"No, did he? Well, that's queer. Alison found time to tell me just before we came up that *she* wanted to stay here all winter — for the experience. What do you think of that for a wild notion?"

Her husband turned to her suddenly and spoke forcefully in an undertone:

"You let Alison do exactly as she pleases; and don't you meddle, Eve, with any of her notions and intentions. I'd bank on Alison every time for having a level head. What she likes, we don't, but —"

"No, thank fortune, we don't. And you needn't speak so to me, Phil, for I'm dead tired, and you seem to think I am going to ask for the banns to be cried for her and your expert when we get back to Groundhouse. Men are so queer at times, and you, my dear, are one of the queerest."

Hearing which, and knowing Evelyn was really put out, her husband hastened to apologize:

"Well, my dear, I'm here for prospective pulp wood, not romance; so you will have to look at things through my eyes till we get away from here. Collamore says he has been up here once before, last year

sometime, and is convinced the big mill will pay roundly on our investment of capital in opening up this wooded region. Dunstanes, too, is all enthusiasm for his job."

"Well, Phil, if we can get away from here and back to that blessed old New York before Christmas I shall be thankful enough. You might say to Alison that you suspect the gentleman is married —"

"I'll be hanged if I will. Now don't get me mad, Evelyn, —"

"Why, Phil Carrolly, as if I wanted you to get mad —"

Her husband went down the ladder backwards with the agility of a monkey. He could gauge, from long experience, the tenacity of his wife on a last word. He really didn't want to lose his temper in the hut. There were no partitions.

3

The next morning Alison took the first opportunity after breakfast, in the preparation of which she and Mrs. Dunstanes considered themselves partners, to prospect a little for herself. Mrs. Carrolly preferred the warm interior, her knitting, and a cozy chat with her young hostess. The men were to take them over to the site of the prospective mill, and the small one already in operation, the next day.

She had barely closed the door and walked a few yards to the right of the hut, and nearer the edge of the bluff, when she stopped short and gave vent to a long-drawn breath of delight.

"Oh, how beautiful!" she exclaimed, and was glad to be alone.

Before her, reaching miles to the southward, was the noble North Lake.

She stood there entranced. Such silent beauty! The atmosphere was calm; there was no movement among the trees, no ripple of water, no call, no cry of any living thing — a stillness as deep as that surrounding the Old Lake Post, but so different. This seemed to her a young silence: air and sunshine, sparkling unsullied snow, the dark woods, — all instinct with vitality, with life-giving refreshment.

4

The North Lake might well be called the great head of the greater Winnipegosis, connected with it, as it is, by the slight sinews of a short portage, were it not for the fact that its waters drain into the Saskatchewan and not into the "Little Sea."

Alison Doane stood there long, marvelling at its beauty. Its frozen surface, snow covered, glittering in the morning sun, was broken by many small islands, showing black on white, for they were rock-ledged and dark with woods. Its high-ridged western shores were crowned by dense cedar forests.

She turned to look at the foreman's hut, and made her second discovery: it faced eastward and looked across, not down the lake. It had a raw appearance in this setting, although the boards were already weather-beaten. At the back, leaning against it, or possibly propping it, was a log cabin of the primitive type. On the end of this was a lean-to. Against it many cords of wood were neatly piled.

She walked around it; the small low entrance was on the farther end. She stepped inside.

It was about eight feet in the walls. One tiny window gave what light there was; she looked out.

It was the same point of view for the scenic setting she admired from the edge of the bluff.

Then and there she made her decision: this cabin should be hers for a while. For one winter, at least, she would live here in this life-giving climate; experience something of the freedom, the expansion of life in this wonderful white solitude of the north so filled with low white sunshine. This should be the second chapter of her one adventure in life, the camping trip through northern Minnesota, and its climax in that one night in the hut among its pine forests. Besides —

What "besides" remained for the time unformulated.

She began to make measurements with the sash of her sweater, as is usual with an inventive woman who prefers to trust her judgment with almost anything, from an apron hem to the stretch of her arm from her nose, rather than a man's accurate foot-rule. She measured door space, window space, furniture space, partition length. She paced a place for the stove. Then she investigated the lean-to. Evidently it was satisfying and absorbing work, for she forgot time and appeared in the hut just before dinner.

5

Mrs. Carrolly looked up inquiringly when she entered. "Where have you been, Alison?"

"Stand and deliver, Alie, or I'll not take you over to the new mill site to-morrow," said her husband.

"I've been prospecting, Phil."

"Good for you. What did you find, a new pulp wood stand?

"Something better —"

"You look as if you had discovered the pot of gold

at the end of the rainbow." Mrs. Dunstanes spoke at the same time, looking admiringly at the flushed, animated face.

"You have made a good guess. At any rate, it is my pot of gold and a real rainbow end this time."

Collamore said nothing, but he watched the play of her expressive face. She was wishing he would interest himself in her affairs so far as to ask her one question, at least. It was evident he was not going to gratify her.

She plunged enthusiastically into the midst of her undertaking, and ended by declaring she would spend the winter in the log cabin plus the lean-to.

"A lean-to? Well, Alison Doane, that's the lim —" Mrs. Carrolly's protest was cut short by her husband.

"You are all right, Alie! Don't heed Evelyn. Cut loose from civilization and convention, and do as you choose for once in your life where there will be no red tape to hamper your movements. I glory in your independence; and I'll give you a commission if you will do something for the comfort of my men up here. They need it, that's a sure thing. I should go to the devil if I had to stay here four weeks."

They laughed at his earnestness; but Collamore told himself there was something more than a mere business superstructure in Carrolly's make-up for which he had not given him credit. If it weren't for his wife —

But there Robert Collamore halted his thought, for he knew it was each to his taste in this world of wide choice, and he read Evelyn Carrolly like a book.

Mrs. Dunstanes grasped both her hands: "Oh, Miss Doane, if you only will! It will be a perfect

arrangement. I don't expect my sister for at least two months." She appealed to her husband.

"I'll put every man at your disposal for one day, Miss Doane, and charge it to the company, if you will stay with us; and every Indian and half-breed that works for me."

"I will stay. It's all settled, Mr. Dunstanes, now that I can have the men to fetch and haul and carry. I wouldn't for the world poach on your business preserve, Phil, but you know they are the one thing necessary to make a paradise out of a wilderness —"

"I have always had a sneaking idea that it was the other way round, Mrs. Carrolly," said Collamore with a mischievous look in Evelyn's direction, seeing which that lady felt an immediate revival of courage. It was the first opening he had made for her to ask a certain question.

"Don't tease, Mr. Collamore, you know what I mean. I want men who can work for me, for I can't peel spruce bark, and that's what I want — and a load of it."

"What for?" Mrs. Carrolly demanded.

"Hold on a minute, Eve, one at a time. I must make a few memoranda." With mock gravity her husband drew out his notebook. "Men are not apt to peel bark in winter for certain structural tree-reasons, eh, Collamore? But we'll try for it. Any more large orders Evelyn and I can fill for you in Montreal or New York?"

"Oh, you may laugh, both of you, but you'll see. Mrs. Dunstanes says there is another big box stove in cold storage here, in my lean-to, — I saw it and it's just what I want and need, — and I'd like it, if it is not to be used for any of the men's huts."

"*Nota bene*," murmured Carrolly, making notes, "another box stove in case the men fall short on account of supplying city guests; and one bigger stove for the new canteen — 'A. D. Association'. How's that? *Mem.* — Chairs and boards for tables and shelves; our little sawmill can't run before spring, Dunstanes?"

"Not before the last of May; but we have some boards. Seems to me you are giving Miss Doane a larger order than she gives you."

"Just what she dotes on, Mr. Dunstanes," said Mrs. Carrolly. "Give her a wilderness, some men, and an object in life, and you have my cousin at her best."

"In any case the stove is yours, Miss Doane. Your cabin was a fisher's hut."

Alison turned triumphantly to her cousin. "You see, now, don't you, Evelyn, how all things work together, even to the comforts of life, up here in this wilderness?"

"Oh, yes, I *see* well enough, my dear; but somehow I don't recognize the end and aim of all this working together." She looked thoroughly puzzled.

"Just have a little patience, Evelyn, and in time you will recognize the face of an old friend; then you will rejoice with me. For surely you and Phil will come up here next summer — and all the way by water."

"Mercy, Alison, do let us get home first."

In the exuberance of her delight at the brightening prospects of making the log cabin into a little home of her own in the wilderness, Alison peeled off her sweater and began to help Mrs. Dunstanes put the simple dinner on a very primitive table — three boards laid on two carpenter's trestles — at which after they were seated the talk became general.

"We are not going to tax your hospitality and the capacity of the hut any longer than is absolutely necessary, Mrs. Dunstanes," said Carrolly. "Mr. Collamore finds he must return to Montreal to consult with a man there. I go with him. As the weather, you say, Mr. Dunstanes, is apt to be fine on the full of the moon in this latitude, I think it will be best to start day after to-morrow. The horses and dogs will be fresh by that time."

"Have you any idea when you will be back, Mr. Collamore?" Mr. Dunstanes asked.

"Not before the last of December at the earliest."

"It is too bad you have to be away from home at Christmas time, Mr. Collamore. Phil and I always think so much of that." Mrs. Carrolly's voice was full of sympathy.

It was said innocently enough; but Alison, looking up quickly from her plate, caught just the slightest lift of Collamore's left eyebrow, and by that token she knew he had seen through her cousin's manœuvre. She wondered how he would take it.

"To be frank, Mrs. Carrolly, Christmas does not mean much to me. It has passed many times without my knowing of the day when I have been alone in the bush or on the range. Much of my young life was passed in the wilderness, and, somehow, my entrance into civilization did not take with it any memories of holidays or home."

He spoke to Mrs. Carrolly, but he glanced quickly at Alison; he detected sudden tears in her eyes.

The very frankness with which she was answered precluded, and for the first time, a ready answer from Evelyn Carrolly's lips. A life that took no note of holidays, a homeless life — it was without the pale of

her experience and imagination. Collamore relieved her slight embarrassment by saying gayly:

"But I can assure you, Mrs. Carrolly, one memory of civilization will linger with me to the end, the tea you make. I never tasted its like, and I am going to suggest you give us all an after dinner treat by making us some. I speak for three cups, and two lumps of sugar in each cup, please."

Hearing this, Evelyn Carrolly beamed on him and made such a teapotful of delicious tea that it marked the day in the hut calendar hanging on the wall, with a red C. Mrs. Dunstanes made sure of that.

Alison Doane said nothing. She was recalling all the saddle-maker had told about this boy-man, so she called him to herself, of his hardships and struggle, and, in the face of them, his ignoring of what defeat could mean.

6

There were gray skies the following morning. During the forenoon the two women went over to the site of the big mill. On their return for dinner it began to snow, despite tradition of full moon influence, and for that afternoon and evening the whole party were necessarily thrown upon their own resources for entertainment. The hut was really too full of humanity to yield entire comfort.

This sudden change of weather gave Mr. Carrolly the fidgets on his wife's account. He feared to be weather-bound in such close quarters and in such a high latitude. It was to bridge over this time of waiting for things to look more propitious, that Collamore entered the breach, assuring them that a little more snow would make the travelling much easier.

Then some barrier of reserve seemed to give way,

and he told them a little of his boyhood in the Turtle Mountains, of his saddle-maker, of McGillie and Kinni-kinnik. He spoke of the Indians who were his friends. He told Mr. Dunstanes that Long John, Kinni-kinnik's grandfather, still in his early sixties, had asked for and obtained the contract for the mail and expected to bring it up to the plant once in six weeks. He hoped to make some arrangement by which he might make the return trip with him. And, speaking of the opening up of available tracts of forest, he was led by some judicious questioning on Phil Carrolly's part, who had conceived a great admiration for the man, to speak of his own apprenticeship for expert in the famous timber belts of his own and other lands; and afterwards of some of his experiences as cowboy, and small rancher in Wyoming.

The hut rang with laughter at some of his stories and the inimitable way in which they were told. When at last the long winter evening came to a close, as good things will, Evelyn Carrolly declared it had been one of the shortest in her life, and nothing would prevent her, if they came up to the plant next summer, from stopping on the way and paying a flying visit to dear old Bill Plunket in Minnesota.

To all of which Alison Doane said never a word. Robert Collamore, wondering a little at her non-responsiveness, told himself that he had not yet the clue to the right approach. But he recalled the sudden tears when he spoke so casually of being homeless, and, in that remembrance, fell asleep as contentedly as does a child hugging to its heart its latest gift, be it ever so small.

7

The morrow brought a marvellous dawn with

promise of good weather. All were early a-stir, horses, dogs, and humans refreshed by their three days of rest.

"You take care of yourself, Alie dear. I can't bear to leave you here, but, of course, if you will stay, you will; that's all there is about it. Phil and I will send up all the things you will want in the way of provision, except what Mrs. Dunstanes says they have in quantity for the men. And you have wood enough; that's one comfort. Good-by, and don't forget the mail will leave once in six weeks. We shall worry if we don't hear regularly." Her husband and Collamore helped her into the sleigh and began to tuck the robes about her.

"I'm so glad, Mr. Collamore, that you will be here at least a part of the time. I *feel* better leaving Alie —" Her husband administered a surreptitious pinch to the leg that was handiest as he put the rugs about her knees. Mrs. Carrolly took the hint.

"You may depend on me to do what I can while I'm here, Mrs. Carrolly."

"I know I can, Mr. Collamore." Evelyn Carrolly smiled sweetly on him, despite the fact that she was at that minute furious with her husband for taking so drastic a method to cut short her diplomacy. "It's a great comfort to me, whatever it may be to Phil."

So the last good-bys were said, Phil Carrolly calling out from the sleigh as it left the hut: "Don't forget, Alison, to have that canteen for the men ready by the time Collamore gets back; he'll need it."

"What are you talking about, Phil Carrolly?", said his wife in surprise. "He won't want to use that —"

"You don't know what *you* are talking about, my dear; but Alison Doane knows what I mean."

"Well, I never!" That was all Mrs. Carrolly said for a moment; then she spoke quite irrelevantly: "Well, I, for one, am thankful to be alone with you again, Phil. Three days without a single minute to talk to you privately in was almost more than I could stand." She snuggled cosily up to her husband, that is, as well as her bundled-up condition would permit, and said guilelessly:

"What do you think of it, Phil dear — do you think it will be a go between those two?"

Whereupon Philip Carrolly groaned and shouted in the same breath. There was no evading Evelyn, not on the subject of matrimony.

8

Very quietly Robert Collamore manœuvred with an Indian's skill to give him a moment alone with the woman he loved, just one minute. The Dunstanes went into the house. The good-bys had all been said. Alison, fully dressed for an early walk, — she wanted to see the sun rise over the dark wooded shores of the lake, for the dawn promised something of unusual beauty, — turned first to the cabin with a sense of ownership. She wanted to take just one peek from that small window within, to see if it gave the full effect of the dawn all adown the lake.

Robert Collamore, having driven a few rods, left his cariole, and appeared at the door of the cabin. She turned quickly from the window, as he entered saying:

"Oh, I know what you are doing — seeing it all, aren't you, just as it will look a month from now?"

"You're right, but how do you know, not being a woman?"

"Oh, I have a way of knowing unknowable things;

I learned it from my Indians. I just wanted to know if there are any commissions for me in Montreal — it's the place to get things."

"It's awfully kind of you to think of that. Indeed there are, and I forgot to tell Phil. I want a few books about this country, this place, anything to make my ignorance less dense, and twelve yards of turkey-red cotton cloth, if you can get it. Thank you so much."

For a moment his masculine bewilderment over his last commission showed plainly.

She offered her hand, risking, as she thought, a good deal after his ignoring of her cordial greeting at the Old Lake Post. The little dawn-filled cabin was at that moment heaven to the man who stood before her, showing, however, nothing of such environment in his face; but he took her hand in a firm clasp. Then it was that Alison caught a look of the "boy" in the forest hut; the features were slightly drawn, the expression set — and she almost told him of it.

"Good-by," he said; "I am looking forward already to Christmas in this little cabin." He turned and left the hut.

"You shall have one that you will remember with Evelyn's tea," she called after him. Without thinking she waved her hand as she did years ago to him when, from his pony's back, he watched the little cavalcade depart from the Hungarians' hut and enter on the trail. The mere moving motion of her hand made a sudden thought-connection. Her face was illumined by that lightning flash of memory. Again she waved her hand to him as the dogs started on the run.

"Good-by, good-by," she called again, and under her breath she added, "Little Owl."

If only he might have heard. He looked back at her. The clear-ringing voice, the movement of the hand, caused him the same confusion of thought that Kinni-kinnik had experienced. Out of that confusion a haunting memory gradually defined itself clearly in his consciousness — and the month of his absence seemed to him eternal in its length.

The Springs of Life

I

"The days are full, full to overflowing with all sorts of things to do," Alison wrote to Evelyn Carrolly after three weeks in the northern wilderness. "I was never busier in my life, not even when there was a rush of department work in the old days in Washington and I was a slave to deadly monotony. I feel so free at last, Evelyn. If these three weeks set the pace for the rest of the winter, it will have gone before I am ready to welcome the spring which comes so late here — in June!

"Tell Phil, with my love, that the hut ('A. D. Association') is quite another place from the ramshackle affair he found on arrival. We expect some of the teams to-morrow and the mail is due next week. I do so hope it will be here before Christmas.

"Two of the men are very clever with their tools and have made me two easy chairs out of some empty hogsheads. One quarter of a hogshead sawed off about twenty inches from the bottom, and canvas and burlap — packing remnants — stretched and fastened on securely for seats. They are saving all the feathers from the winter game for me to make

some cushions. They offer everything in their power to 'help along.'" . . .

"The second biggest stove is in my cabin and works beautifully. Of course, I have only tested it to warmth-giving at 17 below this morning; but it gives promise of great comfort at 40 below. . . .

"I will write you about my own cabin when the teams have come up and brought the things I know you and Phil have sent. I do hope you have put in an oilcloth for my table. I forgot to put it on the list; and it's just like you, Evelyn dear, to send me as substitute a square linen centerpiece and a dozen doilies in Madeira drawn work! Now, isn't it?

"Good-night; and I'm glad you've been here to know how good these nights are, how sound and sweet-sleep-filled. I don't forget how you pinched me wide awake, early on one of those three mornings, just to remind me of the fact that we hadn't slept together since we were young girls; to whisper some of your matrimonial nonsense about Phil, and declare you could not have believed it possible for you to sleep in such conditions so soundly and straight through the night. Oh, Evelyn, Evelyn Carrolly —

"I hear the teams! And Mrs. Dunstanes is calling to me. Good-by, love to you both, and more of it after I see what you have sent up to high latitudes.

"Alie.

"P. S. Be sure to send all the papers you can by every mail. Although we are so many thousands of miles from entrenched battlefield and mine-strewn sea, we are impatient for news — all of us. It is getting under the surface so, here in Canada, — this horrible war."

2

Any man in this northern wilderness of snow and ice, bitter cold, and cruel winds, be he trapper, hunter, Indian, half-breed, explorer, pioneer, settler, or traveller, knows what it means to him to see in any stretch of a hundred miles along the ice-bound highways the light of a camp fire, or the smoke from a few poor wigwams, or a settler's cabin. The light, the smoke, spell for him safety for another night, freedom from the danger of being frozen into unconsciousness.

3

The mail arrived in the twilight of Christmas Eve. The two men, Indian and white, had encountered storms — heavy winds and low temperature following an unusual fall of snow for that region — all the way up from Groundhouse. Both men and dogs were worn with buffeting such weather conditions. When Robert Collamore saw the first light on the bluff, Alison's lamp she had set in the window in the hope of the coming of "Little Owl" and the mail, and knew by its position that it was from her cabin, he was conscious of a profound sense of thankfulness that he had been permitted to live to experience one such moment. To him that light was a beacon.

Out of the bitter hardships of his younger life, out of the turmoil, the stress, the fighting arena of his later life, he was experiencing what it is to have been led mysteriously, but none the less surely, along what had seemed to him a blind trail into a little realm of peace and home and love — and all this coming to *him* just before entering the great arena of a world war in order to wage mortal combat!

The lamplight shining from the snowy bluff was a symbol to him of all this.

Little wonder then, that as he stood at the cabin door, which was flung wide in welcome, he could say nothing; only take the woman's two warm hands, outstretched in welcome, in his cold ones, and look at her as she drew him into the cabin and closed the door. It was Alison who did the talking for a while.

"You're just about frozen!" she exclaimed, setting one of the hogshead easy chairs away from the stove. "So I can't let you sit too near the fire until you are thawed out a bit; it's not safe, you know. And the very first thing a cup of tea, and warmth for the inner man, even if I can't make tea like Evelyn. One cup? What am I talking about? I mean three cups and two lumps in each. That's right, isn't it? How will this do for a merger?"

She held out a tin quart cup, and busied herself with making the tea, wondering, meanwhile, if his cheeks and chin could be really frozen, he was so quiet. No word as yet! Then she thought of the "boy in the hut" and, in part, understood.

Mr. Dunstanes, coming in at that moment with hearty handclasp and heartier words of welcome, took in the situation at a glance.

"If Long John weren't an Indian and a Cree, Collamore, he would be in a worse condition than he is. My wife is tending to him and serving him in about the same way Miss Doane is serving you. But he is thawing out; you will in time."

Alison's talk still ran on like a brook.

"The Dunstanes have been lovely to me, Mr. Collamore, and they've been working like Trojans to get the loft ready for you. They've had only a week since

the teams came up. Phil and Evelyn sent such a lot of nice things. They've put up another stove, Phil sent, in your attic, and what I call a wilderness table for your work. All the things were marked as from both, but you could tell Evelyn's shopping from Phil's with your eyes shut. A man never buys the same things a woman does; so I know the tea-kettle you'll find on your stove is from Evelyn. It must be filled once in two hours, to provide the advertised 'continuous hot water service.' And one end of the loft is filled with firewood. I have added some birch bark of my own garnering; it's to start your fires if ever you have the courage to let one go out. *I* tell the Dunstanes they will spoil a good expert."

"How about you, Miss Doane?" said Mr. Dunstanes. "Seems to me you are doing your share to effect the change." He watched her pour out a quart cup of steaming tea, and drop six lumps into it before she offered it to Collamore who took it and drank eagerly.

He looked up over the rim. "I thank you," was all he could say.

"Merely doing the honors of my new home to welcome a wayfarer, Mr. Collamore; don't let the tea spoil your appetite for supper. The Dunstanes are coming to celebrate my first Christmas in the wilderness, and we count, of course, on you. When did you eat last?" At which practical question both men smiled, and Alison, perceiving the relaxing of the muscles in Collamore's face, sighed relief. At least, he was not frozen into silence.

"Come along with me, Collamore, now you have finished your tea, and thaw out gradually in your attic. My wife is waiting for you rather impatiently,

she wants you to see the old loft; and be sure — this is a marital hint for which I charge no commission for your future use — to express your highest approval of her efforts. *She* did it. A man would have let another man take his chances and bunk in where he could; but a woman takes no chances with a man's comfort, that is, if she is the real article like my wife." He turned at the door before opening it. "We'll all be in for supper when Collamore is thoroughly thawed out, Miss Doane, and we'll bring in the mail; there is a big pile of it. My wife is sorting it out now."

4

It was Robert Collamore's first real Christmas. He recalled dimly an attempt at one when he was a small boy living with his mother and uncle on the sheep ranch; but all details were blurred. He knew this Christmas would live distinct in his memory till the end, for a woman's hand was at the helm of all the preparation, and that woman the one he loved.

No item of Christmassy importance was forgotten, even to a stocking for each of the occupants of the hut and cabin as well as for each man at the plant. The teamsters were not forgotten, nor the Indians, including Long John who carried back tales of the "medicine-woman" to Kinni-kinnik and Carmastic.

When it was past, Collamore settled down to the close exacting work in his special line. He preferred to cook for himself in the men's canteen; he was used to living from his own base in his years of knocking about, and he liked the independence. But he accepted the Dunstanes' hospitality of the loft for sleeping purposes. His evenings he spent between the two huts, but mostly with Alison. They were his refreshment, these evenings, his recreation, because

he was with her — and his time was short. The second week of February was set for his return with Long John after the delivery of the second mail.

The Dunstanes, discerning which way the wind was blowing, tactfully aided and abetted him by ignoring his preference for the cabin.

5

He was telling her one evening as he smoked tranquilly, both heart and soul taking their ease, of some of the episodes of his life in the Turtle Mountains and among them of his fast in the nest in the treetop, of his dream and its "medicine." He dwelt especially on the importance Carmastic attached to a man's "medicine," and explained it to her as the old medicine-man had explained it to him.

She listened eagerly, thoughtfully; then, at last, she put a question:

"And what was the dream?"

"That I can't tell."

"You mean you are superstitious?" She chaffed him a bit on his Indian superstitions, all of which he accepted good-naturedly; but she knew he evaded giving her any satisfactory answer.

"You can't help being affected somewhat by all that mass of Indian tradition and lore if you live with them as I did. It is all so wonderful and never to be learned by a white man — all symbolism. And Turtle Mountain is a paradise of Indian lore. Do you know, I used to call it my road to Paradise, that approach to the Mountains? It was so changed when I went through there four months ago. The intrusion of the Present was everywhere in evidence — even to a possible motor service! *That* almost knocked my Indian past into a cocked hat."

She did not press him further, although she would have given much to know what it was he dreamed, and what its significance might be to him.

"So you too have had a road to Paradise?"

"Yes; did you?"

"Oh, didn't I! Away back in my babyhood, pretty nearly."

"Tell me about it, will you?"

"You tell first."

He smiled. Often they were as boy and girl together. That was a part of her charm.

"You see, it was only my *road;* the Turtle Mountains didn't prove to be a paradise, for Jane Plunket's tongue could make a purgatory, or worse, out of any paradise. However, I had more than three years of grace with my saddle-maker before Jane put in her appearance."

"But didn't it lead to some kind of paradise?"

"Yes; did yours?"

"Yes," she hesitated, "in a way it did."

"That sounds dubious. Any angel with the flaming sword to bar your entrance?"

"Not exactly; I think a bolt was drawn instead. What did you do after Jane came on the scene?"

"I cleared out as quickly as I could. But I had one winter in my own little lean-to —"

"No! You don't mean to tell me you had a lean-to — like mine?"

"I did; and one that's next best to this."

"Tell me about it, do."

He told her of those months on his own hook, as he expressed it; of the growing sense of isolation in the mountains, of his burning desire to get away from it all and see the world in his own way.

"I was so dead lonely that winter. You see, I had a dog," — Alison kept her eyes on her knitting, — "and she died in the October before I moved into my lean-to. She had been with me all the time in the mountains. I never knew what it was to be really lonesome while she was with me, and she was always with me, day and night."

"What happened to her?"

"The saddle-maker and I set out to see something of the world over Minnesota way. You see, Jane and he had had a tiff, a three-years-long, English-Indian huff, and he thought it was about time to make up. Of course I took the bitch. She had a litter while we were there —"

"What part of Minnesota was that?"

"Not far from Bemidji, about thirty miles. Why?"

It came rather suddenly. Alison Doane did some thinking before she answered. Meanwhile, with a woman's wile, she counted aloud some stitches on the turn of the heel.

"Because my father owned some pine lands near there, years ago when I was a young girl; and I have always had an interest in that part of the State."

"Do you own them now?"

"No. What about the bitch and her puppies?"

He smiled. "My saddle-maker always said I was born wanting my own way, but I haven't always had it just the same. You see, the mother of those puppies knew a thing or two more than I did about what she wanted to do with them, and how she wanted to bring them up. But I was thirteen at the time, and *knew* I knew better. So I tried to show her

where she ought to keep the puppies; naturally she objected. I tried to have my way with her for three days in succession. Then, because she disobeyed me and did with her own what she knew to be the right thing, I got mad and punished her — struck her — and I had never laid hand on her in punishment before; she had never done anything to deserve it." He was silent for a moment.

"I never could understand why she left — ran away, hid herself in the deep woods or in some place where I and none of the Indians could find her. I think my boy's heart pretty nearly broke as the weeks went by and no dog."

"Did you never find her?"

"Yes; three weeks after she disappeared I found her in a hut, part of a loggers' camp not ten miles from the Indian village where Jane and Plunket lived for a month or two when they had made up. The dog was dead when I got there." Alison was hoping he would go further; but he said nothing more.

"It seems to me easy enough to understand why she left you."

"Why?" He looked up a little surprised.

"Because she loved you — and you struck her."

"I suppose that's the psychology of it. But I did penance. I had to bring up those five puppies by hand that winter. I kept Bully, one of the five, for years; then he died, and I had nothing but a wolf cub for companion."

"What do you mean?" Alison spoke almost abruptly.

"Why it's this way: a man has to have something to love or he returns to the type, you know; and I was alone for some months in a wilderness to which

this about here is civilization. The mother I had to shoot; the cub I saved. That was a cub! I knew the bitch was my shadow, but the cub considered himself literally a part of me. It was bitterly cold that year and he was brought up, you might say, inside my shirt. Anyway he felt he belonged there, and he went with me wherever the shirt went — and that went most everywhere I went, for it was the only one I had.

"But in time he forgot that he was growing up, and when the shirt couldn't hold him any longer I made a sort of kangaroo's pouch of skins, and hung it round my neck in front. He occupied that till he outgrew it. After that he had to stay in the dugout — door fast — which did not please his cubship. Honestly I could hear him howl and bark a mile off of a still night."

"What was his name?"

"He was such a high-cock-o'-lorum of a cub that I called him Solomon; Sol, for short. It fitted him all right."

Alison laughed. "However did you happen on that name?"

"Oh, I found something about a certain king in a part of an old book I brought with me to the mountains. It was the only book I had there for years. Once I got hold of a regular dime hair-raiser some one, surveyor or trader, had dropped on the trail; but it couldn't thrill me like the stories in my book. I think you would write that with a capital B."

"You mean the Bible?"

He nodded. "Yes, it's a great book, as my saddle-maker used to say, although he didn't read in it. But his mother used to, when he was a kid, and I've

always fancied that had something to do with his respect for it."

Alison Doane was silent, intent apparently on her knitting; but she was not counting this time. She was thinking what a many-sided man was this Robert Collamore. No wonder the saddle-maker found him interesting.

"How long did you keep Solomon?" she said at last.

"Until he grew too large to have around. He used to put his two paws about my neck and hang on for dear life — no small weight — his hind legs dragging on the ground. And then *he* reverted to his type. It wouldn't have been safe to keep him any longer; but he tided me over those nine months. Now tell me something about *your* road to Paradise — that is, if you will."

"Were you ever in Annapolis?"

"Yes, once, several years ago."

"Then you don't know the old Yard, I mean before the new buildings were put up?"

"No, that was long before I made acquaintance with civilization."

"I was born there. Evelyn's father was county judge and my father was clerk of his courts. You remember the old gate? That is still there."

"Yes, distinctly."

"My road to Paradise led through that gate. Inside there were long avenues of great trees, and 'Officers' Row', and a glimpse of the Chesapeake, the old sea wall, and the fascinating ships beyond."

"And you used to sail away on those ships to wonderful lands, didn't you?"

"Now, how do you know that?" Her face grew bright and flushed with the recollection.

"Because you're the kind that makes just such voyages. I did, too, when I used to read in my old fragment of a Book about the 'ships of Tarshish' — which, I take it, the real Solomon commandeered — bringing in their cargoes: 'gold and silver, ivory and apes, and peacocks.' I'd never seen so much as the tail of an ape or peacock, nor a picture of them, but my head used to swim reading about such things. I was drunk with the joy of imagining them, especially the apes and peacocks."

"Then you know." She spoke joyously. "I'll tell you some more. It seemed to me as if within the Gate the bugles were always blowing clear, beautiful notes, and there was some sort of music all the time, of bird or band. It was such a joy to me to stand there beside it with my old nurse, 'Phemie, and watch what passed through it: cadets, and middies, and sailors, and officers in their blue and gold, and, every June, bridal processions that used to fare so merrily from old Saint Anne's to the Yard. I can see, even now, all that shimmer of bride-white and the glitter of epaulettes and swords. I can hear the music this very minute, here in this wilderness silence." She paused, seemingly lost in remembrance.

"But there was one great mystery, so solemn, so over-shadowing to my child's soul. I used to watch the long train of the military funeral, arms reversed, passing through that Gate to the sound of muffled drums. In a way, that shadow has never been lifted; I can't account for that. But my road to Paradise," — she looked at him with a serene smile and quiet eyes, — "only led through that Gate. The road itself was a long, long road."

"Tell me more, will you?" Robert Collamore's

voice was deeply earnest. But she answered rather lightly — these were the sudden changes to which he could not easily accustom himself:

"That was only one station on the way that I have told you about. You know there must be just as many 'stations' on the road to Paradise as to Calvary, don't you?"

The man simply nodded assent. He knew now that all the lightness covered depths of experience. He knew she was like himself in this.

"No, I'm not going to tell you my next station on the road till you have told me yours — if you will?" she said, imitating his tone towards her.

He laughed out at that. "Oh, well, if you're going to 'trade' about experiences on the road, I'll surely meet you halfway. Perhaps two words will tell you more about my boyhood and manhood than anything I can say; they are 'hardship' and 'endurance.' They cover many, many years."

"May I know something of those years?"

He hesitated to speak.

"I am wondering if the telling could give you any real idea, any satisfaction. A man goes down into the arena of life to fight. A woman — I can't conceive of her knowing anything about such fighting."

"We women don't always make our fight in public like men, but we have our struggle, many of us, just the same. We're human, you know."

"Yes, I know; but you don't fight in our way. Mine has been a long struggle to get on my feet."

She might have retorted, "So has mine", but she knew it was no time to speak. She was hoping he would be more definite about himself.

"I don't believe you can understand it even if I

tell you.—To lie in a snowdrift for warmth and to save yourself from freezing; to go hungry rather than beg; to starve, almost, at times; to succumb, exhausted, parched with thirst in the desert; to live alone with the cattle on the range; to round them up in the bitter weather; to look to them for companionship, no other available; to 'cruise' alone in a forest wilderness, perhaps for months; to bunk in with all sorts; make your bed in a manger, or a dugout, or trench. Don't think I'm whimpering about life. It's only that I can't think of you as knowing anything about such an experience. I'm wondering if I had better say much about it. It isn't my way."

"I know it isn't." She spoke understandingly.

"But, at least, my life was a free one. I was my own master. I could go when and where I pleased, but always with the end in view to get enough for mere existence. Still there were joys, good ones too. I actually used to enjoy the prospect of a stampede. Sometimes the cattle become terrified, you know, panic-stricken, and a stampede threatens. A severe thunderstorm will do that. Or a few of them get emotional; think something unseen is going to hurt them, and communicate their fear to the others. At such times I used to measure myself, had to, against the brute herd. It was the psychology of the thing that was so intensely interesting to me, although I knew no more of book psychology than the cattle I attempted to quiet.

"I can hear even now their uneasy stirring at the approach of a storm; I can see the movements, I used to call them 'rudderless.' Then I used to go in and out among them, whistling low and serenely. They knew my presence; the human unit comforted

them. Some one, something was there of power to be a rudder for them. Then when the tempest of the plains broke, with lightning zigzagging, blue, — Gee, what lightning! — and the thunder literally crashing to earth, as if its mere sound could crush us all, man and beasts, it was a man's eye, alert, commanding, hypnotic, his low cool whistle, in the dead silence between the thunder roll and another crash, that held the hundreds there where they belonged — kept them from stampeding. I rarely had to shoot to prevent a stampede."

Alison Doane began to understand what he meant when he said she could not enter into such experience as his. This was a man's experience; it belonged with the man-force in creation.

"But I'm talking you blind," he said half apologetically.

She had dropped the stocking into her lap, her hands were folded over it. Her eyes were fixed on the man whom she knew as a little lad. In her mind's eye she saw him again, lifting his dog to his shoulders; saw him leave the hut; lay the animal across the pony, fling himself on and disappear, with Long John following. What a life had been his! As she did not answer, he spoke again.

"Now for *your* second station; fair play, you know."

She thought about it a moment before speaking. This man was no stranger; she had known him ever since she was sixteen — at least, she felt she had. She decided she could trust him. Neither would he think she was "whimpering" about life.

"I lost my mother when I was eleven, and my father when I was nearly eighteen. Evelyn was all

I had left of blood relations. She offered me her home, but I wanted to live my life in my own way —"

"Same here," he said, interrupting her.

"A life of dependence would have been no life for me." She waited a minute, hesitating to make her decision. Yes, she would tell him all.

"My father was almost obsessed with a desire to invest his small property in this, that, and the other. There were bird-lime men aplenty to snare him. He was always telling me of what he was doing to provide handsomely for me. When he died I found myself the inheritor of all he left in this world — debts. They amounted to nearly ten thousand dollars."

She looked at him almost appealingly. "You know, they say the greatest thing in life is love; but isn't there one thing more than life — honor?"

Collamore was too moved to answer. He would not show her how much. He could not trust his voice at just that moment; he knew it would shake. He was thinking of that night at the Old Lake Post when he trusted this woman to meet him with the same trust he had in her, believing her ideals to be the same. How she was living up, all unconsciously, to that trust!

"I did the best I could. I qualified for a position in the Treasury Department and obtained one. Then I told my father's creditors if they would trust me I would, in time, pay them with interest. They did. I paid them to the last cent. It took me eighteen years — eighteen years out of my girlhood and young womanhood.

"I was treasury expert for ten years of the time. I handled money — mouldy, chewed, burnt-to-ashes, water-soaked money, and redeemed it in part, bringing

joy, I hope, to many a troubled man or woman. I worked till my soul loathed the sight, the sound, of money in the concrete. I worked day in day out till I thought the monotony would kill me; then," she smiled archly, "*I* stampeded, all by myself. You see, in reality, I was a herd, a herd of revolted sentiments, ideas, outlooks. I had been in the straitjacket of routine for all those years, looking forward to the time when, pensioned, I might breathe freely. It took courage to give up that prospect.

"I remember I stood at an upper window of the Treasury Building, looking into space as I thought, for my sight was turned inwards on myself, my trouble, my indecision; and suddenly I was aware that the clouds, which had settled over the city, were parting and above them and through them the top of the Monument began to brighten in the sunshine it caught and held. Somehow, that gave me courage to act and act at once."

She took a long breath. The man opposite, leaning forward, his arms along his knees, his hands clasped between them, involuntarily drew in his. He, too, felt that deliverance; in the light of it, his own experience seemed as naught.

"When were you free?" was all he said.

"About six months ago. I had saved something out of those years, and I have a passion for out-of-doors which I could not indulge myself in; I used to work through my vacations for the extra money. I felt that if I could take up some piece of land in Minnesota at a reasonable price, I could have a little home there and, at least, live. After I knew my father had invested in some pine lands in that State, I hoped to redeem them from the hands of others. That was

not to be; but, at least, I could see them. So I took the proceeds of the land, eight hundred dollars, sloughed off my old working skin and came out with my cousins to Minnesota where, by the way, I stayed with your saddle-maker a whole month —"

"McGillie told me you did; Kinni-kinnik told him."

"He did? Why didn't you tell me so?" she demanded, taken unawares.

"Because I knew if I waited long enough *you* would tell me; it comes with better grace from you."

She began to wonder if, by any possibility, he could know of her in connection with that episode of the dog and his boyhood. She thought not. There was no way of his knowing; the saddle-maker never wrote letters, and Stella knew nothing of their conversation. For a moment she thought rapidly both in a circle and a straight line before she answered. At any rate she would give him the message. She played for time a little.

"Your saddle-maker seemed to look on this northern wilderness from the Turtle Mountains to Groundhouse as bounded by you, McGillie, Kinni-kinnik, and all his old Indian friends; and as he had told me about all of you, and I told him I would try to look up Kinni-kinnik at the New Mission, if my cousins remained long enough, why he took it for granted, I suppose, that you, too, might look them up. He said you were going from the Turtle Mountains to Ottawa, and from there 'north' — he didn't say when or where; but it was natural enough for the old man to think it possible for me to run across you somewhere on my indefinite travels, as," she added with a glint of fun in her eyes, "I happened to."

"Happened? Do you believe in chance?"

It was an unexpected question, put abruptly and in no particularly gentle tones. It quenched all the fun. She realized she must answer this time without subterfuge.

"No."

He took a long breath. "I feel better."

This was all he said, and left the woman to interpret his words as she might. A right interpretation, in such case, depends very generally on the make-up — character, temperament, and depth of insight into another's character and temperament — of the woman to whom they are said.

"Mr. Plunket —," she began, but was interrupted by such a peal of laughter that she looked at him in amazement.

"'Scuse me, but I never in all my life heard Bill Plunket called 'Mister'; somehow that's a misfit."

"I don't see why. Of course I couldn't call him 'Plunket' or 'Bill'; and what is more I didn't want to, for if ever there was a gentleman in this world he is one." Her words showed slight resentment at which Robert Collamore smiled.

"Of course he is. God's noblemen are always gentlemen. But, you see, being bush-bred and range-bred, I never associate gentleman with 'Mister.' The man who *is* a man, decent, brave, cool-headed, gentle, honest, a good fighter, and a better hater, as well as an all-round good comrade, *never* gets 'mistered' with us. It's only my point of view, however, and I mustn't expect you to share it."

It was Alison Doane's turn to smile. "Just give me time and the loan of your range-bred glasses once in a while, and I think I shall get it. Anyway, Mr. Plunket — and *my* saddle-maker —"

"Not yours; he is *mine;* always has been mine."

She knew he was teasing. "And you'll let me share him with you?"

"I'll see; perhaps — sometime. What was it you were going to say about our 'Mr. Plunket'?"

"He told me to tell you if ever I should see you —"

"What made him think of saying that? How could he have any reason for thinking we should meet anywhere on this earth?"

She realized at once he was trying to enmesh her by this question, trying to find out if she had ever heard of him, Robert Collamore, before she made acquaintance with the saddle-maker.

She was not ready to gratify him, not yet. She wanted to wait till just before he left her. This give-and-take was so delightful; this finding out little by little about each other, man and woman who had seen each other as boy and girl — although all unknown to him — in such peculiar circumstances more than twenty years ago.

She gave him Bill Plunket's message verbatim.

"He said, 'Tell him from me to let me know 'bout that war business as soon as he knows himself.' I thought from that you must have some war work in view, perhaps in the interest of the Canadian government."

"I have, in a way."

He waited to let that statement sink in for a moment before telling her the whole truth. His time was short; but ten days, now, before he left for Val Cartier. He was waiting for the arrival of Long John. He knew the time had come to test this woman, who by her very frankness baffled him, as to how deeply she cared for him.

She looked at him inquiringly as if waiting for something more definite, but without any indication of emotional disturbance. Very evidently the significance of his statement did not sink in.

"I fancied you had. So many of our own have felt they must, and have had to cross the border to do it." She spoke almost bitterly. He knew her patriotism. They had talked the situation over together, and he knew her position in this matter.

"I took my own way — the way that was made plain to me. I am going from here to Val Cartier to enlist in the Canadian overseas forces. McGillie and a few of our Indians go with me."

He spoke in a matter-of-fact way, quietly, not looking at her, for he was opening the stove top to drop in his cigar end. Before straightening himself he raised his eyes to her face.

She was looking at him intently, with no surprise evident; just a steady fixing of her eyes on him, the pupils dilating till the blue showed black. Her color, however, so clear and delicate always, and beautifully deepened when she grew animated, was gone, washed out, wiped out. But even as he looked at her it came back, creeping at first into her cheeks, then surging up her temples to the curve of the heavy dark hair above them.

When she spoke her voice was clear and steady:

"If a man can, it is the only thing for him to do, I know."

Robert Collamore was baffled. He did not sit down again for it was late.

"I mustn't disturb the Dunstanes any more than I can help," he said, putting on his blanket coat; "they are the best ever, but for that very reason no decent

man wants to practise Indian tricks on them in order to steal in at night without noise — and I've been doing it the last four weeks."

She smiled at that. She, too, knew his noiseless Indian ways. So many times she had looked around during her walks to the "great spruces," to find him walking behind her; or, coming in from the lean-to with an armful of pine boughs, found him seated in the hogshead chair he had preëmpted, reading.

"Good-night," she said; "come in to-morrow for supper. I shall have a famous dish ready. Ba'tiste brought it to me this morning. It's hanging in the lean-to at present."

"I'll be here, sure thing. I wouldn't, shouldn't, oughtn't, and couldn't if I would, miss that treat. I know your top-of-the-stove roasts. No," he said, putting her, the flat of his hand on her shoulder, away from the door, "don't come any nearer; it's a good forty below to-night, but no wind fortunately. Keep up a good fire."

6

The night was the coldest thus far of the winter, forty below. It was crystal clear, the star shine magnificent, every golden light-ray of the far distant suns accentuated in the frost atmosphere of the subarctic north.

Warmly dressed and wrapped in the "comforts", Alison Doane sat throughout that night by the stove, "stoking" from time to time from the large pile of wood the half-breed had brought in before supper. During all the hours of that long northern night she, as it were, "watched" beside her own heart and soul.

She wanted to be sure that what she felt for Robert Collamore was what she had been waiting all her life

to feel for some one. She wanted no illusion, no vain imaginings to intervene, casting a transitory glamour upon it. She wanted to know if this, which, making itself known in her consciousness through the shock of the impending and immediate loss of this man's joyous companionship, had suddenly showed its full face to her, was the real thing. She was going to look it directly in the face, even as it looked her, in order to make sure.

She sought both without and within for light. Other women had loved this man. She knew of two, a half-breed and an Indian; and although he had repulsed their advances, made according to the love in their hearts, nevertheless he had kept during all these years both their devotion and their respect. She told herself this was one test of the man; it satisfied her.

Of white women who had loved him, she knew none, nor did she care to know. What were they to her? What to her were even the women whom, in all probability, he had loved? What had she to do with them? Nothing, she told herself. All that concerned her was what she felt towards this man, whose presence she was about to lose out of her life; what she hoped — but dared not believe, for he had given her no special cause for either hoping or believing — he might possibly feel towards her. She could not know.

She had not looked at him or at herself through any light other than the daily one of delightful acquaintance, rather intimate because of the surroundings and circumstances in which they were thrown together. She had been revelling in the fact, so far as he was concerned, that she was playing a delightful

game of hide-and-seek; she knew him, but he did not recognize her. And now the time was come that it was all of no avail, either the disclosure of herself to him, or the fact that she was enjoying in this new acquaintance an interesting dual personality — the man-of-the-Present and the boy-of-the-Past. Sometimes he was the one, again the other; then both so evasively combined that she could not quite find her bearings in talking with and addressing him. He was to her man-boy and boy-man, according as her mood changed to suit his, or to adjust itself to all the imaginings of her girlhood and womanhood.

She knew, looking the newly discovered fact squarely in the face, that the boy had filled many of her waking thoughts and a few times her sleep-enwrapped consciousness. Or was it, perhaps, the waking hours that were sleep-filled and the dream-hours the reality? He had come to her in her dreams, but always in search of her in the woods; always with a gift in his hand that he was pressing on her. It was never the shell which she knew now to be the sacred shell of some Indian medicine-woman. Carmastic said it was his mother's; but the old medicine-man rambled at times; he was too old to be reliable as to memories. It was always something she could not see, could not grasp; only she was aware it was a gift, and for her.

Many a time, coming home from the Treasury Building to her room in Georgetown, in the late afternoon of a winter's day when the dank mists from the Potomac were rising and filling the whole city with dreariness, the trees dripping moisture, the thought of the hut in the pine woods, of the music and dancing, swept away all realization of her environment. And

time and again, when the dull routine of her working life threatened to atrophy her innate enthusiasm for what each new day might bring her in the way of an acquaintance, a book, a new picture, or a sunset beyond the Potomac, the remembrance of the dog, and the coming of that boy, his heart torn with grief, brought with it healthful diversion of mind.

In the past, it was always the anticipation of each new day, the looking forward, with her vivid imagination as motive power, to what was a possibility in each day, that kept her so fresh-hearted, so youthful in looks, so alert in mind and body.

But now? Now, suddenly, there was complete collapse of all her dream world, for without this man's presence she could not anticipate the days.

"So it has come to this," she said to herself.

And now he had enlisted; this was a fact. He was going over late in spring or during the early summer. The flood tide of war would not recede; it was advancing overwhelmingly upon all that European land which she had so longed to see. There was no lingering on the part of the men training in Val Cartier. A few months, and they were off — these strong men of the West and North with eyes keen for prairie distances, and a sight that could discern the tiniest markings on a mosquito's wing; with arms and hands that could clear the forest, till the land; build a log cabin, a railroad, bridge an abyss; wield a scythe as well as a bayonet, and work a machine gun with the same vigor with which they could handle a miner's pick. And Robert Collamore was one of these.

After many hours she was at last passive, not thinking at all, only feeling.

When at last the little cabin began slowly to fill

with a vague immaterial light, that in the north is called dawn, she knew she had made sure. She knew she loved this man upon whose trail her thought had followed hard all these years; knew she loved him for time and for eternity.

In the light of this love, she knew that his going could make no difference so far as the unchangeableness of this love was concerned. She recognized, moreover, that this love was *her* love. She knew nothing of his real feeling towards her, but that did not matter now. All her life, if she must go softly along her special trail, she would know that this love of hers for him must go with her. This was her comfort.

At sunrise she renewed the fire, which she had replenished almost hourly during the night, and lay down to get a little sleep before facing a new day.

7

He ran in upon her unexpectedly about four the next afternoon while she was busy with the preparation of their simple supper. She heard his signal, a tap on the window, and, as the door opened, his cheery voice:

"Come on out, do, for a walk to the spruces. It's only fifteen below now, a clear rise of twenty-five degrees since last night, and no wind. The west looks as if it were staging for a good sunset, and we mustn't miss that."

He stepped inside, closing the door. He sniffed vigorously. "That 'something' smells bully."

"It won't smell so bully if I leave it to its own destruction, so make your choice — sunset or supper; but I want to go just the same."

Her back was towards him as she leaned over the stove. When, at the last words, she turned, Colla-

more looked at her, as Carmastic had once looked at him, in amazement at the radiance of her face. His first thought was purely masculine: "She can look like this and yet she knows I am going." The next was quite another.

After his eyes had rested for a full minute on her face, he took in the fact of her white dress, white sweater and white knitted sash looped through an exquisitely tinted pink and white buckle—buckle, no!

"No," he told himself; "that's no buckle."

His thought ran like lightning over his past, illuminating every portion of his long trail for the young girl in the hut who had been kind to his dog; who had been his boy's ideal of all that was best and sweetest in life since he saw her sitting on the floor of that hut, the bitch's head on her lap.

No; this was no buckle. He recognized it: the shell belonging to Carmastic's old sister, Flying Loon, and her peace gift to him. It was the sacred shell belonging to the old squaw's mother; the same shell he had thrust into that girl's hand after following her along the trail through the pine forest twenty-two years ago. There could be no mistake; they were too rare among both whites and Indians. Moreover, he recalled that motion of her hand when he left for Montreal, her "Good-by, good-by." It was all clear to him now.

In the presence of such a mystery of life's leadings, the warm air of the cabin seemed about to suffocate him.

He opened the door and, making no excuse, went out into the clear cold. He walked to the edge of the bluff and looked into space, seeing nothing but the woman's radiant face and the divinely beautiful tints

of the sacred shell at her belt. He realized she was not smiling as she looked at him; but it seemed to the man, looking off into space and seeing nothing but that face, as if the very flame of life, burning its brightest in the woman's soul, were illumining the delicately tinted shell of the flesh, so transfiguring it.

Just so the sacred shell had looked to him when, long years ago in the Turtle Mountains, he kindled a bit of birch bark in the night, and holding it behind the convex surface saw the fine texture of pink and white transfused and transfigured into a thing of unearthly beauty.

Had she known all the time? Had she sought him, as he had sought her, through all the trails of memory and the world? Had they both come into this wilderness of the great north to find each other? He would soon find out. He went back to the cabin.

"Almost ready?" he called, as he opened the door for the second time.

"Yes. I'll set the pot off the stove till I get back; but your supper will be late."

"Never mind for once; all the better appetite. Got enough on? Yes? Well — er — suppose you take that red thing, muffler you call it, you wear around your neck sometimes, and sometimes around your waist. I never knew a thing like that could be put to so many uses; it takes a woman to invent them. It's liable to drop five degrees to every mile, after sunset in this part of the world. You may need it."

8

Out into the silences they went, the frozen silences of the great North Land. They went swiftly, he trailing her; went silently. It seemed a desecration for either of them to speak an unnecessary word.

Through the forest of cedar and jack-pine and birch, the west began to send its shafts of sunset light. As they neared the "great spruces," there was radiated from the illumined bark of the southwesterly exposure of their trunks a dull, reddish-brown, misty glow that filled all the atmosphere to the height of the lowest branches. Above it, the bare anatomy of birch here and there was finely etched into the solid background of the flaming west. Every cedar was a solid blotch against the crimson, and, across a natural clearing, all the spruce tops "jagged" black against blood red.

They reached the "great spruces" and stood beneath them to watch the glory in the west. As yet neither of them had spoken, for neither, unbeknown to the other, felt it to be necessary.

Together they watched the background of changing sky deepen from red to purple. Together they marvelled at its shift from purple to pale gold, daffodil yellow, orange-tawny yellow — one mass of solid color. They saw that fade slowly at last into bluish gray which, in time, would deepen into the blue-black of a northern night.

Alison shivered slightly. The sudden drop in temperature, that Collamore had predicted, was making itself felt.

"You're cold," he said. He thought he was speaking in tones of the last trump, so clear his voice sounded in the darkening woods, so loud the thumping of his heart. Of a sudden with his left arm he flung wide his ample blanket-coat.

"Come under my blanket, Alison," he said, and waited for her to come.

He knew she knew the full significance of the

words. He had told her of their deep meaning to an Indian when he loved. For one moment she hesitated; then drew close to his side. She was enfolded and warmed against his heart.

And there under the great spruces they stood while the faint stars came out, and in the silent wilderness they drank together of the springs of life which is love.

Val Cartier

I

During the week that followed, until Long John's arrival with the mail, and for the four days after while Collamore waited to return with him to Groundhouse, the man and woman, whose long trails had at last met and merged, lived a lifetime that passed as an hour.

Robert Collamore's heart and soul expanded in the sunshine of the presence of his love; he opened both to her, wide. There was nothing he desired to hide from her. Human he was, very, a "rank sinner" as he once described himself to her, but on the whole he had tried to walk upright, "face forward", his back to what he regretted, and his whole manhood outreaching to better ends, to helpfulness towards others, to — as he said to her — "some real living."

He told her of Carmastic's design of the Path of Life, how what the old Indian said to him had influenced him for the past twenty years and more. He told her of its temptations — drawing the diagram for her in the back of her notebook — that he had sometimes withstood, to which, sometimes, he had yielded: the wiles of women, the lure of fire-water. Of the "freezing cold, the hunger that starves, the

scorching heat that parches with thirst", of these she already knew.

"But I never followed any one of them so far as to lose the trail, Alie," he said to her that last evening together, "the trail that I was sure was leading me to what I have now in you. You see," — he hesitated, — "I had never lived until I met you."

She looked at him inquiringly, rather surprised at just such a statement. If any man had really "lived", she would have said this man had, because of his varied experience, his loving and hating, his fighting and forgiving, his compassion for others, his amusing undying big grudges against those who had done him petty wrongs.

He nodded emphatically.

"Every man has his hour, and this is mine. One hour, so far, in a whole lifetime. It's worth living for, dying for, girl! And I expect to have one more of another kind, when I'm over there and get my hands on the throat of some slayer of old women and little children."

He looked into her face and smiled.

"What more can a man ask for in this world? This one hour here with you. And then my luck — think of it! — to be one infinitesimal human atom sandwiched in between the upheaved, broken-in-pieces, red-lava-overflowed strata of two ages in humanity's history; and, just at the right moment, to be given a fighting chance to strike one blow for the survival of what should be most fit for this world. Two such hours — I say the very gods may envy me."

He lighted a cigar and smoked placidly. It did Alison Doane's heart and soul good to see him.

"I fancy Mrs. Carrolly will be disappointed that she hasn't a wedding reception for you in immediate prospect."

"I can hear her sputter to Phil about that 'wasted opportunity.' She is so kind at heart, and has wanted to do so much for me that I couldn't accept. I'd be willing to wager that when I get her answer she will insist on my coming in the circumstances to her."

"Will you go?" he spoke abruptly.

"Why, no, Bob, how can you think that? You know, in your old Book, there is a little book of Ruth —"

"Never read that. Tell me about it."

She told him; a simple enough story which contains, however, what is possibly the finest expression of woman's devotion in the whole range of literature.

"And so, Bob dear, I, too, can say, 'Your people shall be my people,' and consequently there will be no going to live with Evelyn after *this*. I shall stay here till the lakes are free from ice, and then meet you at Val Cartier just before you go. Afterwards I shall go back to the New Mission; there is plenty for me to do there. And next winter I shall still be there, only I've half promised Mrs. Dunstanes — she has really been lovely to me in everything; so dear and sensible, you know, about all this selfishness of ours — to spend the three hard winter months up here with her.

"And then, too, I know Phil's interest in the new project. You see, I shall have a canteen, like the women overseas, up here in this wilderness. Mr. Dunstanes says there will be loggers and teamsters coming and going next year; and the men are so appreciative of the little comforts only women can

give them. I've already found that out. Oh, I've work enough cut out to fill every day as well as evening."

He reached for her hands, and held them close.

"I may as well tell you, Alison — what you must know — that all mine is yours. I've seen to that up here, taking no chances between here and Groundhouse. The Dunstanes and one of the men are witnesses. And, moreover, when I get back into civilization, the first thing will be to make you sole manager, while I am away, of whatever is mine, with use of same in case you need it for yourself or 'our people.' I don't want them to suffer in any way, now that McGillie and Chum and Kinni-kinnik's brothers all go with me. You will know the right thing to do every time."

Her eyes filled, but she did not speak.

He laughed out happily. "Oh, but you *are* bully, Alison Doane. I know all the bully things you will do for them — better than I could do them." He drew her to him, to hold her close while he whispered:

"Tell me true, do you understand why I do not ask you to have the wedding now before I go, rather than to wait till I get back?"

Then Alison Doane, putting him away from her that she might look into his face, and with both hands on his shoulders, spoke out of the fineness of a loving woman's understanding of the man who was her life:

"Bob, dear, I understand. I am your wife in heart and soul. Indeed, I think I must have been ever since that time when I took you as a boy into my heart. No words of man, pronounced by man, can make me more your wife in that way than I am now. And you," she looked him directly in the

eyes, "are what I call consecrated. When your summons came there in the Turtle Mountains, it was as you have told me, consecration. It is no time to put this matter of 'wedding' each other first. That can wait. That makes no difference in my love for you, or in yours for me."

His face grew white under the stress of his feeling. How she had read him, met his ideals!

"You are right, Alie. You understand. What we feel for each other goes down deep into — I thank my Maker for it — but I have no words to tell you. Come here, to me."

2

Five months afterwards, on a July day, there came slowly down the shed, where the troops from Val Cartier were entraining, an old man, leaning heavily on a cane. He was crippled with rheumatism. With him was a woman whom many a man turned to look after, for her face was like a benediction in its expression of radiant serenity. Her arm was linked in the old man's.

Alison Doane had taken the saddle-maker very literally under her wing and escorted him from Minnesota to Val Cartier to see his "Son."

Collamore leaped from the steps of the train. He had been afraid he might miss them. Yet, at one time, for the space of a thought, he cried "Coward," and wished for his own sake and Alison's he might be spared the ordeal.

"Hi, there, Plunket," he cried out joyfully, waving his hat and hands the sooner to attract their attention. "I was dead afraid you'd be late, both of you." He was speaking to Plunket and pumping his hand, but his eyes were on Alison, seeing which she was content.

"'Tain't so easy gettin' here, Bob." Suddenly he dashed the back of his hand across his eyes.

"Damn it all, Son, I want to go too. If I wasn't so old, if it wasn't for these pesky rheumatics, I'd show fight, an'—an' show 'em an old man could—could—"

He was struggling painfully with his emotion, ashamed and fearing to break down. But bracing himself on his cane, he conquered.

"Give it to 'em, Bob!" He shouted so loud that McGillie, hearing him, dashed from the train and came plunging towards him through the crowd. "Get yer dander up same as ye did when ye was goin' to kill that Injun that did ye on the pony trade. Ye'll get 'em then, or my name ain't Bill Plunket. I can't take ye up by the slack o' yer shirt as I did then an' hold ye back, even if I wanted to which I don't. Hunk into 'em same as ye hunked into McGillie that time in the Turtle Mountains when ye fought for a girl, an' the folks to home will back ye every time."

"You may bet your life I will, Plunket."

The starting signal was given. There followed a general handshaking.

The saddle-maker turned away then, that he might not see the parting of the two he loved best on earth; but, Alison, catching him with both hands by his bowed shoulders, turned him face about. She was smiling bravely.

"Good-by, Bob; don't forget to look in the right hand pocket of your rain coat. I tucked that long-legged pair of socks in there."

The train moved out. She waved her hand.

Of such stuff are made the women of To-day who, loving truly, give their all.

The Winged Word

Within twelve months many of the tribes of the Great North sensed something of the truth.

The Montagnais about the headwaters of the Saguenay, as well as the Indians of the St. John and the Penobscot, knew of it. The ten thousand Chippewa of Minnesota, on their own lands and Government reservations, or foot-loose and wretched, yet free, in groves and swamps, also knew — White Earth, Red Lake, Otter-tail, Pillager, Mille Lac: the Word was whispered from one to the other.

Across the Dakota plains to the lone reservation in that half-encircling bend of the Missouri, which duplicates the Souris, the Word was carried as if on wings. The Sioux knew of the Monstrosity to which the white civilization had at last given birth, and all the horror of its deformity. Thence, far westward into Montana, among the foothills of the Rockies, the Blackfeet heard and knew — and considered the White Man's burden.

Over the Canadian border, around the campfires of the British Columbia Kootenais, the crucifixion of a free humanity was spoken of with bated breath, an echo thereof reaching even to the isolated band of Bear-fighting Sioux in the mountainous district of western Alberta. And from there, eastward, all adown the far flung slope of the Great Divide to the swampy shores of Hudson's Bay, the Word concerning the Black Terror went forth by messenger, scout, agent, hunter, trapper, trader, factor; by rail, water, steam, paddle, and electricity.

The Assiniboine and the Athabascan knew it, and the Rocky Mountain Stonies. It came to the

knowledge of Wood Cree, Swamp Cree, Plain Cree, as many months before it had come to their poor remnant from the Turtle Mountains, now living at the New Mission where upon hut and tepee lay the shadow of the Terror; for because of it, their "Son," together with Chum, with Colin McGillie, Kinni-kinnik's brothers, and a few from the northern tribes, had crossed the ocean with thousands of their humankind to help throttle the hydra-headed Monstrosity of an unthinkable Tyranny.

IV

IN THE HILLS OF FRANCE

IV

IN THE HILLS OF FRANCE

1

WINTER silence is on the heights and in the little valley, and on the plain, upon which it opens, now covered with freshly fallen snow; nor roar of gun nor shriek of shell disturbs it. The air is crystal clear and sunshine filled, unflecked, at this moment, by bird or bird-machine.

Without warning a barrage is put down; followed by drum fire, fire of machine guns, trench-mortar fire, hell fire — and some men are cut off in a salient. . .

2

McGillie salutes his commanding officer. Behind McGillie are Chum and Kinni-kinnik's brothers, statue-like, hands at helmets.

"Well, McGillie?"

"Me an' the Injuns, Sir, want to go through and bring out Collamore alive or dead; he's my blood-brother, Sir."

"Very well."

3

Sunset silence on hills and valley. The men, resting for a few hours behind the line, notice the flash and flare of a fire kindled on the snowy hillside nearby where, in one of the smallest and most humble of God's acres in France, are the newly made graves,

the result of the day's work. They see silhouetted against the reaching flames the crouching forms of the Indians tending it.

"What are they up to?" An officer, adjusting his glass to observe them more closely, turned to his aide.

"It's one of their customs; McGillie told me they would do it if they got the chance. We had permission for them."

"McGillie is at the base hospital?" The officer kept his eyes glued to the glass.

"Yes — well shot up, though."

"Will he pull through?"

"They think so, but his day is over."

"I must see McGillie," the officer clapped to his glass with decision; "he will be mentioned in orders for the day — and the rest of them," he added with a nod in the direction of the hillside.

4

Night falls. The reflection of the firelight grows dull. In the east the horizon is flooded with the luminous white radiance that heralds a rising full moon. From the hillside comes the sound of loud, long wailing; it pierces the cold air vibrant with the continuous discharge of distant guns.

It is the death chant of the Indians mourning their Son of the Silent Places who has come into his own.

The Song That Was Never Sung

1

There were quiet hours, quiet days, quiet nights, sometimes they seemed eternal in their length, in the cabin overlooking the North Lake after the coming of the telegram, bringing the word which, for a

time, froze the springs of life in a woman's heart. Then the great silent land found voice in the breaking up of winter and the coming of spring which is always on the very threshold of summer.

All the wilderness grew vocal with its waters freeing themselves from ice — rill, rapid, shallow, torrent, fall, the myriads of lakes, the marshes, the great rivers; each swelled the volume of sound with the gradual passing of winter. There was a trickling, tinkling, rippling, singing of little waters, a rushing and roaring of rapid and cataract, but no hint otherwise of spring, no swelling leaf-bud, no pricking of grass blade, no cawing of crows, no whistling wings of wild fowl.

There was no possibility of mail for two months. The waterways of the north in the process of freeing themselves from ice are untrustworthy highways for man and beast. It is always so.

But in the last of May, three weeks before any mail could be expected, the men at the mill saw an Indian in his canoe, paddling swiftly towards the bluff where stood the foreman's hut. It was Long John bringing the mail, and a special package from the front for Alison Doane.

She had been trying to readjust her life during the quiet of those winter days and nights; in part she had succeeded. She told herself that her word to the man of her love, "Your people shall be my people," should be proved by deeds to be no empty promise; for there was McGillie, who would be at home in a few months, helpless, and Kinni-kinnik and her children to be provided for; there were the wives and children of her two brothers to care for, and Chum's squaw and pappooses — all now at Groundhouse and the

reservation, and each to be her special care henceforward. Her saddle-maker, also, who was growing so old and crippled—she must stand to him in Robert's place; and there was Stella to cheer and help onward to independence. She was only waiting for the last of June and settled conditions for making the water journey thither.

When Long John appeared at her door he gave her the package without a word. At the risk of life and limb he had brought it up through a hundred miles of almost impassable wilderness. She tried to thank him, but she could only set abundant food before him. Then, taking her package, she went out, walking rapidly over to the woods where, more than two years before, she and her beloved had drunk together of the wellspring of love which is life.

There was no silence now, as then, for the air was musical with the song of many waters. She took her stand beneath the great spruces and opening her package read:

2

From dugout to dugout; that is a special fact in my special life. It is a far cry from that river bench of the Missouri to this ten by eighteen hole in the ground in France; but the sound carries far, for somehow the above fact annihilates distance.

It is curious, but here in a foreign land, surrounded by the fields of war's wreckage, I am reminded, and more and more often, of my old-time days on the prairies and the plains.

I was driving a provision wagon to the front yesterday. The shells were flying, — one got a near drop

on the tail of my cart, — shrapnel falling. McGillie was with me, and I was just saying to him that I thought it looked like a good "chicken" country, when there came a sudden silence in the ear-splitting chaos of sound, just like the lull in the midst of a tempest on the plains. It's the one thing I can't get used to here — it's so *dead* quiet. In that short breathless silence I actually saw over in the field a "chicken" and heard its call; McGillie is witness. It had the effect of a resurrection trump on both of us. Then again the grinding shriek and roar filled the air.

That momentary lull — you might possibly have counted ten in it — gave time for a memory film to develop in my consciousness, every detail of the picture perfect.

Of course, I knew well enough I was driving a wagon over a field in France — and driving it mighty well, if I do say it, considering the mud and shell holes. But what I saw before me were the Dakota prairies in spring; their vast, treeless, grassy swells vividly green; the horizon line lost in the long ridges of crinkled golden cloud masses lying low above an ocean of changing sunset light. "And I heard the prairie chickens calling from the knolls."

It's just like living in the Book, Alison, to see this great marshalling of the tribes with the end in view to wipe out other tribes.

What's the difference? Call us Amalekites, Amorites, Jebusites, Perizzites — how I loved those jawcrackers when I was a kid! — or by our own names; it's all one in the end. And swords, slings, fire from heaven, war chariots, plagues, all these, also, to the

one end: the wiping out of tribal life that other tribes may live. . . .

I wonder sometimes if the Vision of Ezekiel mightn't have been a fighting plane (there go two of them now in full flight, manœuvring for a Gotha), and Jonah's whale an ancient submarine? Don't laugh; it's not at all unlikely; you remember there is nothing new under the sun? Just read the accounts of both. It's mighty interesting reading, let me tell you. You needn't laugh either — as in my mind's eye I see you will — if I tell you that, anyway, I know the first bombs on this earth are recorded somewhere in the Book annex, a part I never read until a few years ago and don't take much stock in. But the bombs are all right — pitch and pig's grease. You'll find it in the Apocrypha; I don't know where — Gee! They've got that Gotha, and inside our lines too. . . .

I can't help wondering how long, how long; whether four years of this war wilderness, or forty, or four hundred?

Well, that's neither here nor there. I only know that, ignorant of the way we are being led, there goes before us, visible to the eyes of all the tribes, a pillar of cloud by day — battle smoke, the smoke of burning villages, gas clouds; and by night a pillar of fire — shell fire, gun fire, the light of star shells, sometimes the sudden fire curtain of the barrage. And because of these two pillars, seen of us by day and by night, we may not look upon God's face, not yet; only, — I can tell this to you alone, — I know that somehow they are symbols of His presence as real to us as to the Israelites of old.

Thank God our Land has come in at last, but late, late. There is no use crying over spilt milk — lost opportunities, loss of respect, loss of national manhood in the eyes of the other tribes. At last we can begin, as a nation, with the few thousands here, to redeem these past two years and more of national silence by blood sacrifice, the only way to wipe out our shame and humiliation. And in time we, too, shall be able to look God in the face again — like men, for we shall have quitted ourselves as such. This is my faith.

I am to-day a "fully tested, experienced fighting machine." And I intend to stay where this machine can be of the most use *in the fight.* So you will understand my remaining with the Canadian overseas force until our men shall have been trained into just such machines as I am. Then I shall join up with my own in thankfulness of spirit.

The Indians, too, are a factor in this decision. I don't want to leave them. We've trained together, fought together, slept in shell craters half filled with snow slush, and together sought shelter in the same dugout. I shall stick to them as long as I can. They're great!

Smothering smoke, fire drift in our faces, scorch of flame waves on our bodies. Holding my breath, I held my head under the mud and ooze of the bog pond into which we had driven the horses. We ended by saving only ourselves; all else: animals, houses, crops, swept clean away by that mighty flame besom.

So it passed — that miles-wide sheet of crisping

roaring fire driven before a great wind over the Dakota prairies.

A few of us had our baptism of fire yesterday; for me it was like reliving that experience of fourteen years ago on the plains.

I didn't make the acquaintance of the New Testament until long years after I left the Mountain. Then I found it slow, too tame (I was such a born fighter!) in comparison with my fractional part of the Old that dealt mainly with the warring of the tribes.

I think I am beginning to understand something of its meaning now in the light of this warfare. It is a blinding light, Alison; so blinding that things, events, grow "dark through excess of light." You have experienced this when you have tried to look the sun in the face for a second and then turned your darkened sight on a landscape, haven't you?

I think I am beginning to comprehend something of the meaning of a certain blood redemption chronicled there in the new version of the old Hebrew blood sacrifice.

Strange! These experiences, through which I am passing here, leave with me the impression that I have been all through it before — over home, during my life on the plains, in the desert, in the forests, the mountains.

Only last night the dull glow on the horizon of a burning town brought to mind for a second time the uncertain flame of prairie fires.

Again to-night I caught from some devastated garden in that same smouldering town — we've moved up to it — a good whiff of wild thyme. That and

the drum fire, for things are lively on our right, have set me wild.

It is the aroma of the wild sage of the plains that is so strong on the night air. It is the rapid vibration of the Indian drum I am hearing; the tepees I am seeing; the squaws wetting switches of the sage brush and heating them for the use of the men in preserving the right resonance. I see the dance. I close my eyes and hear "the shuffle of moccasins on the hard clay floor." . . .

They must have thought I was plumb crazy, for I rushed out into the night to search for that garden.

I found something better than wild thyme or sage, after locating the devastated garden. In the cellar of a shell-gutted stone house, which once this garden sanctified, — as gardens do, you know, — I found a kiddie about in my condition when the soldiers from the fort rescued me and my saddle-maker from the dugout. He was numb with cold and nearly starved. I warmed him against my heart; just as once I warmed a tiny bird blown from somewhere in the great North by a bitter wind to my nest in the treetop. I didn't tell you this when I told you about my three nights' experience in that tree. I've never told it to any one but you — and that's the same as telling it to myself.

I know how that kiddie felt when he came to, none of his own being left (let's adopt him, Alie); *for I have been there*, my little brother — I should say my two little brothers, my bird-brother and my human one. Our Indians have a way all their own of recognizing brotherhood in bird or beast, and I've grown into it.

I'm throwing up my tin cap. The word has come, "Jerusalem is delivered," after two thousand years plus of bondage! Great news for Jew and Gentile.

Once, years ago, down in "Alabamy", I heard the darkies singing at a camp-meeting:

> "Sound the loud timbrel o'er *Egupt's* dark sea,
> Jehovah's triumphant, his people are free."

I'd like to yell it out right here and now — I remember the tune — only I'm in a listening post. By the way, I've strained my eardrums for three mortal hours and haven't yet heard a peep out of the enemy. My relief has just come; that's why I am scribbling this. . . .

Back again in the dugout. I keep thinking of Jerusalem, *free*. Golly, I'd like to take a peep into some of the ancient cathedrals and chapels here just at this creepy hour — 1.30 in the morning. I fancy I should see all the old cross-legged crusaders getting busy, for surely their spirits must be stirring and animating their mould — what there is left of it.

I can see those grand old boys uncrossing their legs — they've lain so long, so stiff and straight, those stone effigies, on their stone coffin lids. I know just how cramped they must feel, although a sarcophagus top has it easy with a frozen layer of mud at the bottom of a shallow trench. I can see 'em shifting their heavy armor, lifting their visors to get a good look about 'em in this twentieth century, and wondering at the sky-filled naves, the shattered columns, the broken altars, the mark of catapult, cannon ball, and flame; and suddenly, with vision cleared, knowing that our cause is theirs, making

ready to close ranks and help us through to final triumph.

Why, Alison, girl, not down-hearted? I can just *see* you smile and hear your answer: "Not on your life, Bob."

That's all right, but something is troubling you. I wonder —

Look here, Alie, let's thresh it out once and for all, you and I. We don't talk these things here; no real man does, here or anywhere, when he is in action. I don't know that I can write it, much less say it, but it looks to me this way: we've come out here to fight to win, if possible, and what we knew before we came out, what we have seen and felt since being here resolves itself into this: that death explains life, and dying here is really living. *We* can't die, even if they post us as "dead." We're too durned interested in living to die at any time, in any place. You see we've got to live, even though they do say we are dead, to help out and finish this job. Look at it so — and remember what I am telling you. . . .

It is my conviction, and has been for many years, that the nations had forgotten God. On the surface it did not look so; but if they were put under oath they would bear witness to the fact that the fear of God was no longer with them. I write that "word", but I prefer the Indian "Great Mystery."

Men have taken the words "God, our father" on their lips, but their actions, their dealings with men, have belied the brotherhood implied; in a word, they have been perjuring themselves for centuries.

Men's souls have been veneered with the dross of

gold, and veneer of any kind closes the pores. You know well enough the result of that, physically and spiritually.

Men were straining after supremity, very literally stealing and misapplying the force behind the lightning, what the ancients called the "fire from heaven"; and their punishment is being meted out to them through the death instruments of their own invention.

Men were bowing down before idols — before the things that don't count in real living: material possessions, enervating luxuries; worshipping the "beast", erecting altars to strange gods, attributing to themselves something of the powers of the Supreme, the Unknowable.

Now, we find the nations in this fourth year of their purging. It may be the process will last forty years, perhaps forty centuries. I remember Jerusalem and the "two thousand years plus"; and I have lived to see its redemption through blood sacrifice, even as we must be redeemed.

Dare we assert that we, as a nation, are more righteous than others? Better than they? Our skirts cleaner? Our Indians — what of that "century of (national) dishonor"? Our lips, are they more ready to make high protest against injustice, oppression, butchery, outrage? Remember our silence — and Belgium bleeding, crushed.

Away with the hypocrisy of it all! We've got to take our medicine, all of us.

We've got to take it in the old Indian way as well, for this war is a world dream, — call it a world nightmare if you will, — and in it and by means of it we shall find our "medicine." It will be shown to us in this dream terror what that world medicine shall

be. And sometime, whether this year, or a thousand years hence, when we, or coming generations, shall have fought this thing through to final victory, a standard shall be lifted up for the people. They shall all see it — all the tribes, blood-redeemed, whether Celt or Teuton, Slav or Latin. And on that standard shall be pictured the "medicine" of their great world dream of war, and the people shall look to that and be healed. I am wondering what song they'll sing in that day?

Preachy? Sounds like it; but I'm only telling you the way it looks to me.

At this moment of writing you, I see old Carmastic, his moccasinned feet shuffling over the "Path of Life" he has drawn in the accumulated dirt on the wigwam's hard clay floor, and hear him say to me:

"So it is with our Path of Life. We leave no trace on the trail. It is only our medicine that lives on."

Now's my chance! The Colonel's son-in-law, Dick L. — you remember meeting him at Groundhouse? — goes home shortly, permanently invalided. He will take this package and get it through to you somehow. It's just a lot of scrappy thinks and thoughts and thunks of all kinds jotted down at all times and places for just you and me. I have permission. I'm so glad I have a woman of my own with whom I can share my "silences", inner and outer. So, although I'm dead tired, here goes for a kind of postscript to all the scribble. We're back of the lines resting.

This writing to your best friend, who happens to be the woman you love, under the gag rule of censorship is, of course, all right militarily; but humanly it's a

fool thing just the same. You see, surface drainage is needed for a man's heart and affections even in the midst of war; and if he doesn't get it — Well, you know, Alie, just what I mean and what might happen. This is a part of the comfort of you, that you do know just what I mean; you touch bottom with both feet where another woman would flounder.

Wish you could see this; it's some land. It's like what I mean to show you some day — that day when we take the long road together, "We two together" (do you remember that Indian Song of Cadman's? A beautiful thing), and follow the trails of my youth. I shall never rest in mind or muscle until I shall have shown them to you, never.

It's like all that region of the Turtle Mountains with a touch of the forests to the west of North Lake. Think of that, to find yourself over here in France on a piece of country that's part United States, part Canada! Gee whiz, it gives a man a heart-jump just to look out over it from a hill as I did this afternoon: little valleys, and lakes, and hills, almost mountains — a broken country — and forests dark against their snow-covered slopes; great cloud masses, brilliantly white in the winter sunshine, sailing through a deep blue sky over hills, valleys, lakes, woods. Beyond these eastern heights there is the continual roar of guns.

The mere looking at it! And I am back again for an hour in my boyhood with my saddle-maker, McGillie, and the dogs; and my old medicine-man — peace to his ashes! He was full of years and it was time. His last message to me in one of your letters was his first: "Endure" — has been telling me of the centuries of struggle between Cree and Sioux for the region

of the Turtle Mountains sacred to them through tradition; how for centuries, Alic, the tide of battle ebbed and flowed around that hill wilderness of the plains — a regular "Indian Verdun", that land.

How Carmastic used to set me on fire with his tales of the old Indian days and ways! I count it something for a white boy of my generation to have heard those stories once from such a source. . . .

It's curious; I see Chum and Kinni-kinnik's brothers side by side with white men in this struggle, — there has been no segregation of the Indians; they are in the battalions just like the rest of us, — doing the same stunts, and doing them even better; heart and soul in this work of warring; seeing daily enemy acts that even in the days of their race's utmost savagery were never equalled, for savagery is not civilized brutery; dependable, helpful, faithful, quiet, mostly silent, trained — and I marvel at the change in the Indian status.

These men represent the longing and desire of their race. They are fighting for their freedom as well as for ours. They deserve well of their country, and the nation that refuses to them freedom, citizenship, and the same protection of the common law and the appeal to it that is given to the white race, will write its name black on the nation's honor roll, after *this here* to which I bear witness.

I wish I might read the whole Indian mind on this matter. Chum said to me once that he wished his grandfather might have lived to see this special day.

"What do you mean by 'day'?" I asked him.

"I mean this fight with white men to free other white men. It is our warpath to freedom."

You get the Indian thought? They're fighting

for their own freedom, fighting all the more desperately because they know from their fathers of the wrongs their race has suffered at the hands of the whites. After centuries of the white man's dominion and tyranny over his red brothers, after his damnable injustice towards them, his persecution of them, his starving and killing them, his uprooting and hounding them from one reservation to another,— often forgetting, or rather showing unwillingness to recognize them in brotherhood because they happen to be human, if not always, under the goad of the white race's ways of dealing with them, humane, — just look at these few Indians here, fighting for us! It makes me so mad to think of what they have endured that I must not write about it or I shall "cuss" all over this page, and then what would you say to —

Three days later.

A hurry call from the trenches interrupted that last.

You remember my telling you about my boy's fast in the treetop nest, and your asking me to tell you that dream? And how I told you that, according to Indian belief, a man may not tell his dream until he shall have followed the warpath? That he might never sing his dream song until he should have followed that path to victory?

I remember just how you looked when you asked me if I, not being an Indian, wouldn't tell *you?* And you were the woman I loved, and I so wanted to tell you what had never been told. I recall the look in your eyes when, not wishing to break my spell — it was that; I shall have to own up — I gave you an evasive answer. You see, had I told before any

victory was mine, I should have lost my "medicine." It was hard to deny you, but I would not have told you that dream, love or no love. Now, interpret this as best you can. I'll trust you to understand.

Never mind. You did not tease or fret me as a smaller-souled woman might have done; did not tempt me with coaxing. You just smiled again at your own thoughts — wish I knew what they were!

And now, my only Beloved, whom I found in that northern wilderness of ice and snow; whose love I have set "as a seal upon my heart, as a seal upon my arm" (the love I bear you, Alie, is as "strong as death"; and out here we have come to know that the "strength of death" is *life eternal*), I may, at last, tell you my dream. When I see you I may sing for you this song which has never been sung; for know that I have fought to-day, fought desperately — to Victory! (Big V — Glory be!) and shall fight again to-night. But after next week, I shall join up with our own boys on another sector, and fight under our own Red, White, and Blue — thanks be to God.

I couldn't help it, I let out a regular warwhoop when we made the last bayonet charge; and — you'll have to believe me although it seems unbelievable — above the awful confusion of battle, I heard an answering yell. It was Chum near me and in the thick of it. We're out of that thirty minutes of hell all whole — I mean the Indians and I.

Do you know, I think I shall try, sometime, to set my dream song to some real music. All day long, amidst the boom of the great war symphony, a little tune has been running in my head; the idea came to me when —

The little tune of this morning will have an obligato accompaniment of roaring "75's" — we're off again to the front. Good-night, and love — *always*.

3

The woman looked up and around as if seeking a presence. He, to whom the giving of himself in death was true living — he dead? She repudiated the thought.

She turned homewards, and, of a sudden, knew she was not alone. Out of the great Unbroken Silence he had come to walk there beside her in the Land of Singing Waters.

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